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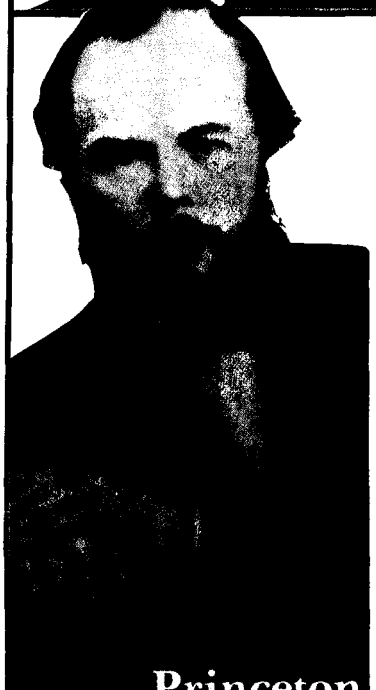

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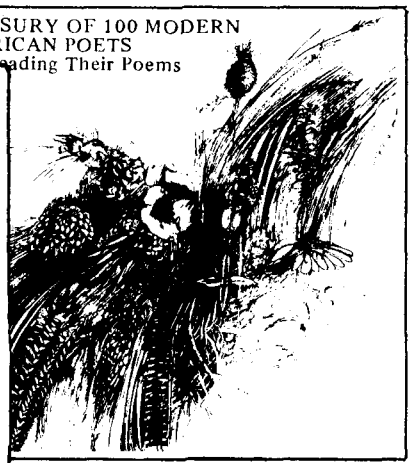

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What's So Funny?

ARISTIDES

One of the trickiest questions on the Stanford-Aristides Personality Profile is the following: Which of these statements would you be least willing to own up to? (1) Good taste is clearly not my long suit. (2) I never have been much good at judging people. (3) I guess I'm pretty much a humorless person. I don't know about you, but I would be more ready to admit to bad taste and poor judgment than humorlessness any day. Yet why? Is it possible that having a good sense of humor is overrated? What can be said against it? For one thing, humor is anti-erotic; it is extremely difficult to be passionate while laughing. For another, a strong sense of humor may well be an obstacle to achievement on the grand scale. Among great statesmen, only Disraeli and Churchill had notably fine senses of humor. Not many laughs are to be found in the works of Aristotle, Newton, Goethe. Animals have no sense of humor; nor do they feel the want of any. Still, I regard my sense of humor as I do my American Express card, and prefer not to leave home without either.

When I was younger and not so profound as I am today—"That's a joke, son," as Senator Claghorn used to say—I thought that a sense of humor was an absolute requirement in anyone I would care to call my friend. As it happens, most of my friends do have a sense of humor; it is required if they are to tolerate me. But I have since met many men and women with superior humor who seem to me otherwise inferior people. A sense of humor is an ornament to character but no replacement for it. In certain lines of work I can do nicely, thank you very much, with workers whose sense of humor is not too spirited. I shouldn't want a surgeon who too greatly enjoys jokes, lest one occurs to him while one or another of my vitals is under his blade. I prefer my accountants without mordancy, my dentists without wit, my clergymen altogether unribald. I used to go to a barber named Felix who caused me to laugh so much and so hard in the chair that getting a haircut from him became unsafe. "As funny as a theologian" (or undertaker, or physical therapist, or plumber) is not a phrase one often hears or, with luck, ever will.

Despite all this, most of us highly value a sense of humor; and among those of us who do so value it, few things are funnier than a humorless person. "Only man has dignity," Ronald Knox has said, "only man, therefore, can be funny." Excessive dignity can be excessively funny. The story is told of a dinner given by Prime Minister and Mrs. Harold Macmillan for General and Mme de Gaulle, at which Mrs. Macmillan is supposed to have said to Mme de Gaulle: "Your husband has accomplished so much. You have both lived such rich and full lives. Is there anything left for you? Is there anything you still desire?" To which Mme de Gaulle is said to have replied, "Yes, one thing: a penis." After a brief stunned silence, General de Gaulle interjected: "*Non, non, ma chéri*, the word is pronounced *Happiness*." No doubt that story is apocryphal, and while it is about the international comedy of trying to speak foreign languages, it wouldn't be as good with a less dignified cast of characters. With M. and Mme François Mauriac, it would be only mildly amusing. With M. and Mme André Gide, it becomes too complicated to be funny at all.

If there were a pantheon of the humorless, who—along with General de Gaulle—would be in it? Some American names that leap to mind: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Woodrow Wilson, Douglas MacArthur, Walter Cronkite. A place would surely have to be reserved for D. H. Lawrence. Wordsworth would get in on the first ballot. So would Wagner. What about the reigning Queen of England? Or Fidel Castro? Or General Jaruzelski? Has there, in fact, ever been a witty Communist? Milan

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Kundera, the Czech novelist, has remarked of his life during the early days of the Communist regime in his country: "I could always recognize a person who was not a Stalinist, a person whom I needn't fear, by the way he smiled. A sense of humor was a trustworthy sign of recognition."

A sense of humor is not, thus far at least, one of the items that the Japanese have chosen to export. Henry James once wrote of the Italians: "The more I see of them, the more struck I am with their having no sense of the ridiculous." The Germans have not been notable for their rip-roaring, rollicking sense of humor either, to put it very gently, yet there have been supremely funny German writers, among them Heinrich Heine and, perhaps surprisingly, Thomas Mann. (Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull* is a comic masterpiece.) Mark Twain, during his days as a comic lecturer, always preferred not to work his act in churches, commenting: "People are afraid to laugh in a church. They can't be made to do it in any possible way." Yet the current Pope has a sense of humor. So, too, must God; after all, he created the world.

Then, for me, there is that special category of people who are supposed to be funny, but whom I have never quite found so. I have never found Art Buchwald funny. P. G. Wodehouse I find only mildly funny. Peter De Vries, whose humor knocks so many people out, has always left me sturdily on my feet. I find Ogden Nash funny only in flashes. And here is a confession that may land me in the pantheon of the humorless: Mark Twain doesn't do it for me either. I know he is reputed to be very funny; I know about the rich tradition of Southwestern humor and all that; but for me Mark Twain's humor falls into that saddest of all comic categories, the faintly amusing. Dickens breaks me up, but Twain leaves me, alas, in one stolid piece.

What do I find funny? I have lately been reading the letters of Henry James, and find much cause in them, as James himself might put it, for high risibility. When James, in the midst of his great dining-out period in London (in the 1878–79 social season he dined out no fewer than 107 times), remarks that he cannot face "yet another inscrutable entrée," I laugh. When, after his disastrous attempt to lower his artistic sights by writing for the London stage, James caps the horrendous experience by noting that "you can't make a sow's ear out of a silk purse," I laugh again. I find Proust I won't say a scream but pretty damn funny when portraying his pedants, his snobs, his malapropistic headwaiters. The Baron de Charlus I believe to be one of the great comic creatures of all time, and when he returns to Proust's page a clapping sound goes off in my heart of the kind one makes to greet the appearance on stage of only the greatest actors. Kafka, in some of the details that appear in the midst of his nightmare stories, can also make my laugh-meter jump.

Kafka, I recognize, is not normally thought sidesplitting, but then humor turns up in odd places. That is part of its charm—its unexpectedness. I not long ago read a lovely but not notably funny book entitled *West with the Night* by Beryl Markham. Miss Markham was an aviatrix in East Africa in the 1930s. (When the gender gap finally closes—*clunk!*—I hope we don't have to surrender the word *aviatrix*, which has always seemed to me to combine adventure with beauty.) At one point in her book Miss Markham describes the perpetually busy Hindu telegraph operators she encountered along the Uganda Railway. Whenever she came upon them, she comments, they seemed always to be tapping away. What, in desolate East Africa, could have kept the forefingers of these Babus, as Hindus in Africa were then called, so endlessly occupied? "I have no idea of what they really talked about," Miss Markham writes. "Possibly I do the Babus an injustice, but I think at best they used to read the novels of Anthony Trollope to each other over the wire." Pardon my giggle, but I find that very funny.

I think W. C. Fields very funny, too. Chaplin's charm is undeniable, Buster Keaton can put me on the floor, the Marx Brothers frequently have my number, but in my opinion W. C. Fields was the best of all movie comedians because his movies conveyed the most complete expression of a comic personality. A story is told about Fields's last words on his deathbed in a hospital in New York. His doctor, his mistress, a few close friends are in the room. Outside it is cold and snowing, the newsboys, hawking their papers, are crying out "Wuxtry! Wuxtry!" Fields, who has been dozing, on the edge of death, opens his eyes and signals the people in the room to gather round his bed. In a barely audible

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whisper, he says: "Poor little urchins out there. No doubt improperly clad and ill-nourished. Something's got to be done about them! Something's got to be done!" Fields closes his eyes. His friends return to their chairs. Twenty seconds later, he opens his eyes, signaling his company back to his bedside. They lean in to hear what he now has to say. "On second thought," Fields whispers, "screw 'em!" Now this story, too, may well be apocryphal, but if it is the man or woman who made it up is a small comic genius, for one cannot imagine a deathbed scene for the great comic that is more Fieldsian.

I am perfectly ready to accept that not everyone will find this anecdote funny. Those newsboys wouldn't have. Nor would Jane Addams. Nor would an ardent socialist, however otherwise good-natured he might be. The first condition of humor is its un-universality. If music be a universal language, humor is a quite particular one. "What is it like for people not to have the same sense of humor?" Wittgenstein asks. "They do not react properly to each other. It's as though there were a custom amongst certain people for one person to throw another a ball which he is supposed to catch and throw back; but some people, instead of throwing it back, put it in their pocket." Too true. Different jokes for different folks.

Which is why no useful all-purpose definition of humor can ever quite hold up. Such definitions as we have of humor are all right as far as they go, which is never far enough. Henri Bergson, in his exceedingly humorless essay *On Laughter*, defined humor as the release from inhibitions. Arthur Koestler, in *The Act of Creation*, defined humor as "the perceiving of a situation or idea in two self-consistent but mutually incompatible frames of reference or associative contexts," adding, with great Koestlerian confidence, "This formula can be shown to have a general validity for all forms of humor and wit." Freud, rather depressingly in my view, considered most humor to be secret aggression that often hid sexual motives.

> Sex and aggression, sex and aggression,
> My God, my dear Dr. Freud,
> Can there be no other use for expression?

The reason all definitions of humor are disappointing is that the motives for laughter are too diverse, contradictory, paradoxical. Humor may well be a reflex, a release, an act of aggression, the joining together of incompatible frames of reference—it may well be all of these things, and yet it is none of them alone. Humor is, as Wittgenstein (himself not a famously funny fellow) once said, "a way of looking at the world." Not everyone looks at it in the same way. "To explain the nature of laughter and tears," wrote Hazlitt, "is to account for the condition of human life; for it is in a manner compounded of these two!"

Although I should know better than to enter the definition-of-humor sweepstakes, here nonetheless are a few soft definitions. Humor is the element missing from most bores. (I exclude those bores who are always insisting upon their own humorousness.) Humor is any extremely well-phrased comment on yet another, hitherto unrevealed aspect of the bizarreness of life. Humor is what is funny to the humorous; it can include mots, puns, witticisms, and sheer whimsicality. Comedy, as Santayana put it, "is life caught in the act"; to which I would add, it is especially people caught in the act, which is why pretension is always such a fine target for humor.

"You know, Dottie," Robert Benchley said to Dorothy Parker after her third or fourth attempt at suicide, "you keep this up, you're going to make yourself very sick." Listening to a sonorous lecture on the subject of the importance of the humanities, I recall a friend, sitting next to me, say of the lecturer, "I'd like this guy better if his name were Moe." Of William Morris, Max Beerbohm once said: "Of course we all know that Morris was a wonderful all-round man, but the act of walking round him has always tired me." Still on the subject of pretension, Oliver Goldsmith once said of David Garrick: "On the stage he was natural, simple, affection. 'Twas only that when he was off he was acting."

Pricking pretension, letting the air out of the balloon tires of pomposity, belongs to that department of humor known as the put-down. Another name for it is creative abuse. Not everyone has a taste for this; I do. A little richly deserved and well-aimed malice seems to me a fine thing. Creative abuse involves the art of establishing a feeling of hopelessness in the next fellow. Some people specialize in it. Stephen Potter, in such books as *One-upmanship*, *Lifemanship*, and *Gamesmanship*, wrote

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instructional manuals on how to go about it. But many people require no such instruction. A. E. Housman, for example, is said to have jotted down acidulous phrases as they occurred to him and then later inserted these phrases in reviews of books by fellow Latinists. Subtle creative abuse is better than blatant abuse. An excellent example is Sydney Smith's remark about Macaulay, who was a famous nonstop talker: "He has occasional flashes of silence, that make his conversation perfectly delightful." In the modern era, none surpasses Evelyn Waugh's comment after learning that a benign tumor was removed from the lung of his friend Randolph Churchill: "It was a typical triumph of modern science to find the only part of Randolph that was not malignant and remove it."

A distinction has to be made between before-the-face and behind-the-back put-downs. (C. M. Bowra is supposed to have said of another Oxford don: "He is the kind of man who will stab you in the front.") I have a friend who tells me that when people he scarcely knows address him by his first name, he responds by saying, "My friends call me Mr. Young. Won't you do likewise?" That seems to me extremely good, but, though I have more than once thought of pressing it into service myself, I have yet to find the nerve to do so. When it comes to comic put-downs, I fear that I am largely a behind-the-back or, at best, an in-front-of-the-typewriter man. So apparently was Herman Melville, who wrote of Emerson that he had a gaping flaw: "It was the insinuation that had he lived in those days when the world was made, he might have offered some valuable suggestions."

Gentle put-downs can be lovely in their own quiet way. A friend and his wife were dining at the Russian Tea Room, when up to their table strode a well-known drama critic in a formidable, almost armored double-breasted suit, a shirt of nearly neon stripes, and a necktie that Louis Quatorze might well have rejected as too lavish. After he left, my friend's wife quietly exclaimed, "Dear me, I didn't realize that James went in so for haberdashery." I once attended an editorial board meeting at which one of the members asked if in fact the role of the board wasn't merely to supply window dressing. Edward Shils, who was also at the meeting, responded: "Window dressing," he said, rolling the phrase thoughtfully over his tongue. "Window dressing. Let us consider this fenestral metaphor. Assume we have a window. We might wish to set drapes around it. A cornice perhaps to surround it. A shade might be wanted. Perhaps a curtain. The window, so to speak, is dressed. But, really, just because one has a window in a room doesn't mean one has to look out of it all the time." I have never before, or since, seen wit, whimsy, and a sense of the absurd quite so neatly and spontaneously packed into so ornate a metaphor. I cannot report what the reaction to this extraordinary riposte was on the part of the person who had raised the question of window dressing, for I had to turn my head aside, lest the contortions in my face from suppressed laughter give me away. A sense of humor can sometimes be terribly inconvenient.

If pitched at a sufficiently high level, insults can also be very funny. What is funny about them is usually not the insulted but the insulter. There is something about the rage of a serious insult, if that rage is held under control, that can be hilarious. Frederick Rolfe, the writer who called himself Baron Corvo, was excellent at this sort of insult. And here he is, writing to his publisher, who has been instructed not to forward any letters to him:

> Sir,
>
> I am weary of repeating that you are to accept *no* communications for me. I leave you no discretion. As for the infernally familiar style in which you have presumed to address me, I beg to inform you that I regard it as a fresh outrage committed by an impenitent thief.
>
> By all, to whom I name your name, you are despised or hated; but I doubt whether you ever made a more ruthless or persequent enemy than—
>
> Your obedient servant—
> Frederick William Rolfe

I find funny a man who can deliver himself of such an outburst yet keep it within the bounds of careful syntax and punctuation and even, for good measure, call up so arcane a word as *persequent*.

But then I have a special weakness for insult as a form of humor, for I went to a high school where insult was the chief form that humor took. It wasn't called insult, though; it was called "bugging." Under the auspices of bugging, everyone went after everyone else for any weakness, physical deformity, or psy-

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chological infirmity he could find. It was not insult that came from on high, à la Frederick Rolfe, but it could nonetheless be highly inventive. Adolescent acne—"spots," as the English call it—was termed "tweed," and whoever had the roughest case of it at any particular time was designated, after the Tammany Hall figure, "Boss Tweed." Being underweight or overweight, having slightly squinty or slightly hyperthyroid eyes, failing with girls or being too successful with them, anything and everything was fair game for bugging—including, it needs to be added, the defects of one's parents. The father of one of our circle had served in North Africa during World War II, for example, and about him it was soon bruited that he had spent the better part of the war playing gin rummy with Field Marshal Rommel. ("I'm knocking on two, Desert Fox.") It was an atmosphere, in short, that called not only for wit but for quickness of wit. Around this same time, the early 1950s, the professional insult comedians, Jackie Leonard and Don Rickles chief among them, began turning up. I recall seeing Jackie Leonard, on a television talk show, congratulate the then-young comic Shelley Berman on his recent successful emergence into big-time show business, then, without missing a beat, inquire: "Tell me, kid, where d'ya rent your watch?" Leonard would have done well at our high school, where nice guys didn't finish last; they scarcely finished at all.

Ours is not, I think, a great age of comedians. Television wears them out as do too-quickly-thrown-together movies. Bob Hope I find no longer funny, but a man who has for years been living off comic capital first gathered thirty and forty years ago. Johnny Carson's humor has mostly to do with sniggling sex jokes; his idea of a good laugh is a woman with enormous breasts; and he is funniest when attempting to recover from a badly misfired joke. Jerry Lewis I have never found funny, though there is a joke about him I rather like. This joke has it that the reason he works so hard on behalf of muscular dystrophy is that, because for all those years he imitated spastics, he probably caused a lot of it.

Of the current crop of big-name comedians, the three who have had the strongest and longest run are Richard Pryor, Woody Allen, and Mel Brooks. (Eddie Murphy, Gilda Radner, Dan Aykroyd, and other comedians from *Saturday Night Live*, though capable of wonderful comic bits, have not yet established complete comic personalities.) Much of Pryor's humor is built around the great touchy subject of race, and such pleasure as derives from it comes from his joking, often very well, about the unjokeable. Woody Allen's is largely the humor of self-debasement—what at my high school would have been known as "self-bugging." Fine though it seemed for a while, it now seems rather tired and predictable: all those analysand jokes, those Jewish family-life jokes, those food jokes—one can hear them coming from several hundred versts off. Allen's own great success in the world has undermined his comedy of self-debasement; one cannot, after all, continue to joke about one's sexual ineptitude while living with beautiful movie stars. Mel Brooks is the purest funny man of the three. He is inventive; he has a charming sense of the absurd; he has been given a wonderful prop in his expressive, utterly urban Jewish face, which is itself a delightful affront to pomposity or even sustained seriousness. He is—I use the word as an honorific—silly. Yet I find if I see Mel Brooks roughly once a year, either on television or in a movie, that is sufficient. (Here I must add that he has apparently been able to survive by seeing me even less frequently.)

Great though the gift of comedy is, hopeless though life would seem without it, it is also fragile and can soon become cloying. To be under the burden of always having to be funny is to carry a heavy cross indeed. Charles Lamb—of whom Hazlitt said, "He always made the best pun, and the best remark of the evening"—felt that to be accused of always aiming at wit was a kind of libel, for one shouldn't set out to be witty but instead should allow wit to arise out of natural settings and situations. Professional comedians must be funny every night, must be funny on demand, and this is no laughing matter: few spectacles are sadder than watching a comedian "die" on stage. Nor is the spectacle any jollier of watching those amateur comedians, of whom I know too many, who feel they must come up with a quip or a witticism every thirty or so seconds. It has more than once occurred to me to ask some among them, "What would you take to smother your turgid

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little ironies? Quote me a monthly figure." One of the monumental self-deceptions is that of someone who thinks he is funny when he isn't. Unlike so many other self-deceptions, there isn't anything in the least funny about it.

In the category of the obviously-not-funny, a cornucopia of items must be included. Chimpanzees aren't funny—at least not to me, for when seeing them, I am too vividly reminded of human evolution. Dogs in skirts or jackets aren't funny. Neither are men dressed as women. Most jokes about parrots aren't funny, except the one whose punch line is, "Don't worry, we'll double our money on Yom Kippur." Off-color greeting cards aren't funny. Only two bumper stickers have struck me as funny of the hundreds I have seen: one, written over a few bars of musical composition, read, "Get Off My Bach!"; the other, a variation on "If You Love Jesus, Honk!," read, "If You Are Jesus, Honk!" I have an acquaintance who, knowing my penchant for jokes, regularly tells me the most unfunny ones imaginable, which are almost invariably about the most hopelessly unfunny subjects: crucifixion, bestiality, masturbation. When he tells them to me, I laugh falsely and try—as it turns out, with an impressive measure of success—to forget them as quickly as I can.

Entire books devoted to humor usually aren't funny. Light verse, for example, can be winning, but a full-blown 540-page collection such as *The Oxford Book of American Light Verse* can make light quickly seem heavy. I recently read a posthumous collection of the comic pieces of Robert Benchley, a man I always think of as very funny indeed, and was disappointed to discover how little of it holds up. In part, this is because time is hell on humor; in greater part, though, it is better to read Benchley—or S. J. Perelman or James Thurber—in short takes. I was not long ago sent a wide and thick volume entitled *The Big Book of Jewish Humor*, and found myself growing bored with it fairly quickly. Jokes tend to fade on paper, where voice and gesture do not accompany them. A book such as *The Big Book of Jewish Humor* is all right, I suppose, but the truth is that I prefer my Jewish humor delivered to me by individual Jews at generous intervals. Reading joke after joke, comic piece after comic piece, is like eating a cookie that is all chocolate chips—it doesn't take long for one's teeth to begin aching and one's lips to purse like those of a bank loan officer greeting a couple who has missed their last eleven mortgage payments.

I used to find slapstick funny but now do so decreasingly. Perhaps my imagination for pain has grown more vivid. A short while ago I saw a Bugs Bunny cartoon, and found my heart going out to Elmer Fudd, that nasty rabbit's victim. The films of The Three Stooges, which cause much mirth in small children, I can no longer bear to watch, for I find myself wincing much more than laughing. The gentler slapstick of Laurel and Hardy, though, still gets to me; watching those two charming men attempting to settle down for the night in a malfunctioning in-a-door bed unfailingly touches my laugh button.

What, then, is so funny? Sex is funny—always, of course, excluding one's own endeavors in this line. One of the things that make pornography so damnable, in my view, is its humorlessness. (Must remember to save a niche in the pantheon of the humorless for Hugh Hefner.) Henry Miller writing about sex can make one laugh; Norman Mailer writing about it can make one cringe. What is funny about sex is its bizarreness, the wide range of appetites it can show, its sharp reminder (for all its glories) of our animality. The best sex jokes demonstrate a tasteful perversity, such as the joke about the nonagenarian who reports to his physician that he notices himself beginning to slow down sexually. "When did you first begin to notice this?" asks the physician, amazed that a nonagenarian is still sexually active at all. "Last night," the man says, "and then again this morning." Or the joke about the two homosexual men sitting at an outdoor cafe, when a voluptuous woman walks past. "Did you ever," one of the men asks the other with a sigh, "wish you were a lesbian?" Such jokes seem to me to hover, skirt, and play around bad taste without quite falling into it, though I am sure they will offend someone—a still-sexually-active nonagenarian homosexual, perhaps.

Jews are funny, Jews are very funny—not individual Jews, but Jews as a comic subject. If you wish to know why this is so, ask History. Having been kicked in the pants so often by History, Jews bring a certain comic preparedness to life. No people, Freud noted, has told so many jokes about itself as the Jews.

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("I'm tired of hearing jokes about Jews," one man says to another. "Don't you know any jokes that aren't about Jews?" "All right," the other says. "One Passover these two Japanese gentlemen, Rabinowitz and Ginsburg. . . .") Perhaps, too, Jews bear out the not-uncommon notion that great humorists are, at bottom, people who have been driven to despair by the conduct of mankind. (This, as Peter De Vries has recently said, is "the tale that dogs the wag.") A man in a bar, quite drunk, offers to buy a round of drinks for everyone in the place, excepting only, as he puts it, "my Jewish friend there at the end of the bar." Twenty minutes later, he offers to buy another round, adding, "but none for my Israelite pal down there." Fifteen minutes more and he offers to buy yet a third round, "excluding of course my Hebrew buddy." Finally, the Jew stands up to say: "Look, I have never met you. We haven't exchanged a word. What do you have against me anyhow?" "I'll tell you what I have against you," the drunk replies, "you sunk the *Titanic*." "What do you mean?" the Jew answers. "I didn't sink the *Titanic*; an iceberg sunk the *Titanic*." The drunk, hiccupping, replies: "Iceberg, Greenberg, Goldberg—you're all no damn good!"

Tyranny is funny; not actual tyranny but the attempts of tyrants to cover up their tyrannousness. How else explain that the strongest flow of jokes right now comes out of Eastern Europe. Andrei Sinyavsky, the Russian émigré writer, reports that the joke "is the only contemporary folk genre in Soviet Russia." For one thing, under tyranny humor is perhaps the only form of emotional outlet; for another, humor, by mocking official falsity and fantasy, brings reality back into focus and serves as a reminder that there is still something in the world known as reason. When one or another tyranny stamps down its heel, jokes squiggle out. During one of the harshest suppressions of the Solidarity movement in Poland, the joke went round the streets of all Polish cities about General Jaruzelski flying to Moscow where he asks for an audience with the corpse of Lenin. This is duly arranged, and Jaruzelski, alone at the bier of Lenin, pours out his heart about the terrible problems he is encountering in Poland. While he is doing so, he notices, through the glass covering Lenin's head, Lenin's lips move. He leans down, placing his ear against the glass, and hears Lenin say, "Arm the workers!"

"We discern in the joke," Andrei Sinyavski writes, "an indulgent and superior vision of life." Bitter though jokes can be, they nonetheless can become, as Sinyavsky says, "an advisor and helper, an explanation and comfort in the most critical situations, as well as for all occasions." Here I recall the one occasion upon which I met Andrei Sinyavsky. Knowing his love of jokes, I told him one. I do not remember what the joke was, but only that, he having no English and I no Russian, I told the joke to him through a translator. After I told a line or two, the translator translated the lines. Finally, after delivering the punch line, I waited while the translator re-delivered it for me in Russian. It was greeted by Sinyavsky not with explosive but with appreciative laughter, after which Sinyavsky spoke a few words in Russian. "That is quite good, Mr. Sinyavsky thinks," the translator reported. I was pleased, though telling jokes around the corner of translation does dreadful things to one's timing. Still, a human transaction had been completed, as it is whenever a decent joke is told. "The joke," as Andrei Sinyavsky reports about the Soviet Union, "is alive and well. God grant it good health."

But apparently the joke is not everywhere in good health. The other day I came upon a story in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that carried the headline, "Use of Humor by College Teachers Found to Stir Suspicion and Hostility." The story began: "Teachers who try to be funny in the classroom probably aren't doing themselves or their students any favors, according to a study at the University of New Mexico. Indeed, the study found a teacher's use of humor is 'likely to be perceived with suspicion and hostility,' causing students to react defensively and thus damaging the climate for communication." The story goes on to report that the researchers found that not only ridiculing humor, which one would expect to have bad results, but even "non-tendentious humor," such as puns and other forms of innocent joking, discouraged what the researchers call "supportive classroom interactions," no matter whether the humor issues from a male or female teacher. The lesson appears clear enough: if he starts joking around, give the professor the hook.

Clear though it may be, the lesson does not go down easily with me. I fear I am one of

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those jokey professors who—though I had not been aware of it—set up defensive reactions (through non-tendentious humor, I trust) and thus cannot expect much in the way of "supportive classroom interactions." But what am I to do? I teach classes of ninety minutes' duration, and usually I find I cannot keep a straight face for that length of time. I am frequently amused at the pomposity of teaching, into which I myself often lapse. I try to keep the "as it weres" and "if you wills" down to a bare minimum, but not long ago I found myself, about to interject an opinion, prefacing it by the phrase "If I may say so," which instantly caused me to add: "I may after all say so, mayn't I? I mean, I see no one out there among you ready to stop me. Of course I may say so." Not that this is so very funny—it isn't—yet I need these little asides and cannot quite imagine functioning without them. Do they cause suspicion and hostility?

I know sometimes they cause confusion. Once, in assigning a paper to a class of freshmen, I said that this paper must be no fewer than five pages with the margins no wider than my necktie. (This was during the wide-tie era in the middle seventies.) A student, bringing her paper to my office, while explaining her reasons for its tardiness, kept staring at my chest. "May I ask what it is you are looking at, Miss Simpson?" I asked. "Your necktie, sir," she answered. "I wanted to make sure I got my margins right." Enough of these dopey little jokes, I said to myself at the time. Yet I have not been able to stop. I am too far gone.

"The world is a comedy to those that think," Horace Walpole said, "a tragedy to those that feel." That is very well put together, but is it true? Can't one both think and feel? Is it appropriate to laugh at serious things? I, for one, think it is not only appropriate but often necessary. "The one serious conviction that a man should have," according to Samuel Butler, "is that nothing is to be taken too seriously." I am reminded here, too, of Henry James's comment upon John Addington Symonds's treatise on homosexuality, "A Problem in Modern Ethics": "I think one ought to wish him more *humour*—it really is *the* saving salt."

One can understand if not altogether sympathize with those undergraduates who react with suspicion and hostility to professorial humor. Much of that humor, given the level of academic jokes, may be quite poor; and the better jokes, my hostile suspicion is, may well go over their young heads. There are few worse feelings than sensing yet missing a joke. To be in that position—and who among us has not been—is to feel excluded, ignorant, somehow put down. Still, must one suppress laughter to accommodate the humorless? This is a piece of reform that is doomed to failure. Those undergraduates who react to humor with suspicion and hostility might do well to read a brief piece by John Donne, who is not exactly everyone's idea of a madcap comic, entitled "That A Wise Man Is Known by Much Laughing," in which Donne remarks that one shows oneself "a Man because he can *laugh*, a *wise Man* that he knows at *what* to laugh, and a *valiant Man* that he *dares* laugh." To the undergraduates at the University of New Mexico I also offer the advice of Henry James: try to be a young man or woman upon whom nothing is lost—to which I would only add, especially the laughs.

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The Drive to Discovery

EDWARD O. WILSON

ONE OF THE MOST DRAMATIC EVENTS of this century was the setting of the first Viking probe on Mars. The landing was scheduled for July 4, 1976, to coincide with the bicentennial of the United States, but it was actually accomplished on July 20. Scientists have anticipated few events with such electric excitement. There was an outside chance that Martian organisms might be detected quickly; a new biology could be created in one stroke. I know that feeling was shared by many following the event in the news, but I had a somewhat more personal interest. In 1964 I had attended a conference about Mars chaired by the ever-ebullient Carl Sagan. We examined the best telescopic data available, speculating in every direction on the possible existence of life on the red planet and ways that it might be analyzed. I served as the instant "exo-ecologist," trying without much seriousness or effect to put a biological construction on the dark zones that spread and retreat through the middle latitudes (they were later proved to be sandstorms). The conferees went home with no firm conclusions but high hopes for the NASA program then being charted.

Now at last, after twelve years of waiting, everyone was to have a close look at the surface of Mars, as though standing there in person, in a place where life might be found. The cameras scanned the Chryse Plain from the foot of the lander to the horizon and transmitted color pictures with a maximum resolution of less than a millimeter. The result was disappointing: no bushes dotted the landscape, no animals walked past the lens. A mechanical arm scooped up soil and analyzed it chemically to reveal reactions that were lifelike but not proof of the presence of microorganisms. The overall scene was nonetheless compelling: it was a landfall on another world remarkably like Earth in many respects. An outwardly familiar desert reached to the horizon where at sunset the thin atmosphere briefly glowed pink and turquoise. Every half-buried pebble, every wind pocket in the soil seen from a few feet away held the attention, hammered the imagination.

Then it was over. A giddying potential had been reduced to the merely known. The cold dust of the desert plain was committed to

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photographs in magazines, then to technical monographs, textbooks, and encyclopedias. The adventure became a set of facts, somehow mundane, to be looked up by students and recalled during leisure reading. A fundamental trait of science was exemplified: the magic had been consumed quickly and the action moved elsewhere. While a great deal remained to be learned, the high tide of research had swept on past an entire planet in less than a year.

Such brilliance fades quickly because newly discovered truths, and not truth in some abstract sense alone, are the ultimate goal and yardstick of the scientific culture. Scientists do not discover in order to know, they know in order to discover. That inversion of purpose is more than just a trait; it is the essence of the matter. Humanists are the shamans of the intellectual tribe, wise men who interpret knowlege and transmit the folklore, rituals, and sacred texts. Scientists are the scouts and hunters. No one rewards a scientist for what he knows. Nobel prizes and other trophies are bestowed for the new facts and theories he brings home to the tribe. One great discovery and the scientist himself is great forever, no matter how foolish the rest of his deeds and pronouncements. No discovery, and he will probably be forgotten, even if he is learned and wise in matters scientific. The humanist grows in stature as he grows in wisdom. He can gain immortality as a critic, and justly so. But this vocational opportunity is not open—not yet—to the scientist. The most memorable critics among scientists are those who served as foils for the discoverers, helping them to clear error from the path. Thus the great Louis Agassiz, cherished by Emerson and Longfellow, the idol of lecture halls along the Atlantic seaboard, is remembered most often today for having been wrong about Darwin.

Scientists therefore spend their productive lives struggling to reach the edge of knowledge in order to make discoveries. David Hilbert, the most successful mathematician of the early 1900s, stated the rules very well: "So long as a branch of science offers an abundance of problems, it will stay alive; a lack of problems foreshadows extinction or the cessation of independent development."

The scientist is not a very romantic figure. Each day he goes into the laboratory or field energized by the hope of a great score. He is brother to the prospector and treasure hunter. Every little discovery is like a gold coin on the ocean floor. The professional's real business, the bone and muscle of the scientific endeavor, amounts to a sort of puttering: trying to find a good problem, thinking up experiments, mulling over data, arguing in the corridor with colleagues, and making guesses with the aid of coffee and chewed pencils until finally something—usually small—is uncovered. Then comes a flurry of letters and telephone calls, followed by the writing of a short paper in an acceptable jargon. The great

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majority of scientists are hardworking, pleasant journeymen, not excessively bright, making their way through a congenial occupation.

Einstein spoke on the occasion of Max Planck's sixtieth birthday. He said that three types of people occupy the temple of science. There are those who enter for purely utilitarian reasons, to have a calling and invent things useful to mankind. Others are attracted by the sport in science, satisfying their ambition through the exercise of superior intellectual power. If an angel of the Lord were to come, Einstein said, and drive all belonging to these first two categories from the temple, a few people would be left, including Planck—"and that is why we love him."

The scientists most esteemed by their colleagues are those who are both very original and committed to the abstract ideal of truth in the midst of clamoring demands of ego and ideology. They pass the acid test of promoting new knowledge even at the expense of losing credit for it. They can face a fact, in accordance with the prayer of Thomas Henry Huxley, even though it slays them. Their principal aim is to discover natural law marked by *elegance*, the right mix of simplicity and latent power. The theory they accept is the one that defeats rival schemes by uniquely explaining the experiments of numerous independent investigators. It is a sleek instrument forged by repeated exposure to stubborn and sometimes inconvenient data. Conversely, the ideal experiment is the one that settles the rival claims of competing theories. Both the dominant theory and its patron data endure only if they fit the explanations of other disciplines through a network of logically tight and quantitative arguments.

This tidy conception is made the more interesting by the deep epistemological problem it creates and the biological process it implies. Elegance is more a product of the human mind than of external reality. It is best understood as a product of organic evolution. The brain depends upon elegance to compensate for its own small size and short lifetime. As the cerebral cortex grew from apish dimensions through hundreds of thousands of years of evolution, it was forced to rely on tricks to enlarge memory and speed computation. The mind therefore specializes in analogy and metaphor, in a sweeping together of chaotic sensory experience into workable categories labeled by words and stacked into hierarchies for quick recovery. To a considerable degree science consists in originating the maximum amount of information with the minimum expenditure of energy. Beauty is the cleanness of line in such formulations, along with symmetry, surprise, and congruence with other prevailing beliefs. This widely accepted definition is why P. A. M. Dirac, after working out the behavior of electrons, could say that physical theories with some physical beauty are also the ones most likely

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to be correct, and why Hermann Weyl, the perfecter of quantum and relativity theory, made an even franker confession: "My work always tried to unite the true with the beautiful; but when I had to choose one or the other, I usually chose the beautiful."

Einstein offered the following solution to the dilemma of truth versus beauty: "God does not care about our mathematical difficulties. He integrates empirically." In other words, a mind with infinite memory store and calculating ability could compute any system as the sum of all its parts, however minute and numerous. Mathematics and beauty are devices by which human beings get through life with the limited intellectual capacity inherited by the species. Like a discerning palate and sexual appetite, these aesthetic contrivances give pleasure. Put in more mechanistic terms, they play upon the circuitry of the brain's limbic system in a way that ultimately promotes survival and reproduction. They lead the scientist adventitiously into the unexplored fractions of space and time, from which he returns to report his findings and fulfill his social role. Riemannian geometry is declared beautiful no less than the bird of paradise, because the mind is innately prepared to receive its symmetry and power. Pleasure is shared, triumph ceremonies held, and the communal hunt resumed. In a memorial tribute to Hermann Minkowski, David Hilbert described this perpetual cycle with gentle botanic images:

> Our Science, which we loved above everything, had brought us together. It appeared to us as a flowering garden. In this garden there were wellworn paths where one might look around at leisure and enjoy oneself without effort, especially at the side of a congenial companion. But we also liked to seek out hidden trails and discovered many an unexpected view which was pleasing to our eyes; and when the one pointed it out to the other, and we admired it together, our joy was complete.

Scientific innovation sometimes sounds like poetry, and I would claim that it is, at least in the earliest stages. The ideal scientist can be said to think like a poet, work like a clerk, and write like a journalist. The ideal poet thinks, works, and writes like a poet. The two vocations draw from the same subconscious wellsprings and depend upon similiar primal stories and images. But where scientists aim for a generalizing formula to which special cases are obedient, seeking unifying natural laws, artists invent special cases immediately. They transmit forms of knowledge in which the knower himself is revealed. Their works are lit by a personal flame and, above all else, they identify, in Roger Shattuck's expression, "the individual as the accountable agent of his action and as the potential seat of human greatness."

The aim of art is not to show how or why an effect is produced (that

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would be science) but literally to produce it. And not by just any cry from the heart—it requires mental discipline no less than does science. In poetry, T. S. Eliot explained, the often-quoted criterion of sublimity misses the mark. What counts is not the greatness of the emotion but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure under which the fusion takes place. The great artist touches others in a surgical manner with the generating impulse, transferring feeling precisely. His work is personal in style but general in effect.

Ideally art is powerful enough to cross cultures; it reads the code of human nature. Octavio Paz's poem "The Broken Waterjar" (*El cántaro roto*) accomplishes this result with splendid effectiveness. Paz is torn by the contradiction in the Mexican experience. He says that the minds of his people are capable of long flights of imagination and visions of piercing beauty. The people look at the sky and add torches, wings, and "bracelets of flaming islands." But they also look down to a desiccated landscape, symbolizing physical and spiritual poverty. A potentially great nation has been divided by the Conquest and stifled by oppression:

> Bare hills, a cold volcano, stone and a sound of panting
> under such splendor, and drouth, the taste of dust,
> the rustle of bare feet in the dust, and one tall tree in the
> middle of the field like a petrified fountain!

The resolution is not offered in the form of practical advice, which might easily prove wrong, but in the poet's vision of unity in a search back through time, "más allá de las aguas del bautismo," to a more secure metaphysical truth, and Paz says:

> vida y muerte no son mundos contrarios, somos un solo
> tallo con dos flores gemelas

Mexico is a single stem with twin flowers, united by the continuity of time. The essence of art, no less than of science, is synecdoche. A carefully chosen part serves for the whole. Some feature of the subject directly perceived or implied by analogy transmits precisely the quality intended. The listener is moved by a single, surprising image. In "The Broken Waterjar" the rustle of bare feet in the dust conveys the pauperization of Mexico. The artist knows which sensibilities shared by his audience will permit the desired impact.

Picasso defined art as the lie that helps us to see the truth. The aphorism fits both art and science, since each in its own way seeks power through elegance. But this inspired distortion is only a technique of thinking and communication. There is still a more basic similarity: both

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are enterprises of discovery. And the binding force lies in our biology and in our relationship to other organisms. In art, the workings of the mind are explored, whereas in science the domain is the world at large, and now, increasingly, the workings of the mind as well. Of equal importance, both rely on similar forms of metaphor and analogy, because they share the brain's strict and peculiar limitations in the processing of information.

Most scientists have been self-conscious at one time or another about their own procedures of discovery. The stakes are high: a major advance can be made by a single insight consuming just a few seconds. Scientific theory is the last and greatest of the cottage industries and the principal source of vitality in every discipline. Is there a secret, a hidden meta-formula by which the mind creates these visible formulas? This question has been addressed in studies of creativity by cognitive psychologists. Their work has advanced rapidly during the past ten years as the iron grip of behaviorist philosophy relaxed and studies of the mind became more respectable. Of equal weight is the testimony of scientists about their own steps to discovery. Essays by Freeman Dyson, J. B. S. Haldane, Werner Heisenberg, Willard Libby, Henri Poincaré, John Wheeler, Chen Ning Yang, and others, form a veritable psychologist's casebook in this most elusive of mental operations.

In my own search for a meta-formula I have had the good fortune of working with gifted mathematicians on subjects for which there was little or no previous theory—no framework of well-defined ideas on which information might be deployed and linked in explanatory chains. Early in my life I discovered that I have very little talent for mathematics. It is simply one of those things you either have or not, and no amount of training or effort will bring it to you, just as most people have little capacity for playing the violin or running a fast mile. Through hard work at college and while a young professor, I became mathematically semi-literate. I can puzzle through articles on pure theory in the journals and advanced textbooks, but I cannot write the rows of original equations that transport the mind from one or two easy propositions by some miracle to a new, counter-intuitive truth. My ability lies in seeing the problem in the first place, envisioning what a subject might look like if a proper theoretical scaffolding and beautiful facts were put in place. In other words I am a scout, not an architect. Nothing is more attractive to me than a muddled domain awaiting its first theory. I feel most at home with a jumble of glittering data and the feeling that they might be fitted together for the first time into some new pattern. This inclination made me especially compatible with mathematicians. I became fascinated with the way they think, why they should be so much better at quantitative reasoning than I, what difference it made in the end, why I

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should be the one so often to suggest moving in a particular direction, but then even more frequently not be able to do so, and finally how different everything looked after a little progress had been made.

From this personal experience and the impressions recorded by others, let me offer the following rough map of innovation in science. You start by loving a subject. Birds, probability theory, explosives, stars, differential equations, storm fronts, sign language, swallowtail butterflies—the odds are that the obsession will have begun in childhood. The subject will be your lodestar and give sanctuary in the shifting mental universe.

A pioneer in molecular biology (still young, because most pioneering work was done after 1950) once told me that his fascination with the replication of DNA molecules began when he was given an erector set as a child. Playing with the toy, he saw the possibilities of creation by the multiplication and rearrangement of identical units. The great metallurgist Cyril Smith owed his devotion to alloys to the fact that he was color blind. The impairment caused him to turn his attention at an early age to the intricate black-and-white patterns to be seen everywhere in nature, to swirls, filigree, and banding, and eventually to the fine structure of metal. Albert Camus spoke for all such innovators when he said that "a man's work is nothing but this slow trek to rediscover, through the detours of art, those two or three great and simple images in whose presence his heart first opened."

The subject we love is probably also well known to others. So we have to travel away from it into regions deliberately chosen for their lack of previous attention. Science has flourished in Western cultures because this difficult step was recognized by society as valuable, and rewarded. Nothing comes harder than original thought. Even the most gifted scientist spends only a tiny fraction of his waking hours doing it, probably less than one tenth of one percent. The rest of the time his mind hugs the coast of the known, reworking old information, adding lesser data, giving reluctant attention to the ideas of others (what use can *I* make of them?), warming lazily to the memory of successful experiments, and looking for a problem—always looking for a problem, something that can be accomplished, that will lead somewhere, anywhere.

There is, in addition, an optimal degree of novelty in problem seeking, one that is difficult to measure and follow. Stick to the coast too tightly and only minor new data will follow. Venture out of sight and you risk getting lost at sea. Years of effort might then be wasted, competitors will hint that the enterprise is pseudo-science, grants and other patronage will be cut off, and tenure and election to the academies denied. The fate of the overly daring is to sail off the rim of the world.

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On one point both psychologists and successful voyagers agree. The key instrument of the creative imagination is analogy. Hideki Yukawa, who reflected on this matter for forty years while working on the nuclear binding force, explained it as follows:

> Suppose that there is something which a person cannot understand. He happens to notice the similarity of this something to some other thing which he understands quite well. By comparing them he may come to understand the thing which he could not understand up to that moment. If his understanding turns out to be appropriate and nobody else has ever come to such an understanding, he can claim that his thinking was really creative.

We have returned to the common, human origin of science and art. The innovator searches for comparisons that no one else has made. He scrambles to tighten his extension by argument, example, and experiment. Important science is not just any similarity glimpsed for the first time. It offers analogies that map the gateways to unexplored terrain. The comparisons meet the criterion of principal metaphor used by art critics: one commanding image synthesized from several units, such that a single complex idea is attained, not by analysis, but by the sudden perception of an objective relation.

Theoretical scientists, inching away from the safe and known, skirting the point of no return, confront nature with a free invention of the intellect. They strip the discovery down and wire it into place in the form of mathematical models or other abstractions that define the perceived relation exactly. The now-naked idea is scrutinized with as much coldness and outward lack of pity as the naturally warm human heart can muster. They try to put it to use, devising experiments or field observations to test its claims. By the rules of scientific procedure it is then either discarded or temporarily sustained. Either way, the central theory encompassing it grows. If the abstractions survive they generate new knowledge from which further exploratory trips of the mind can be planned. Through the repeated alternation between flights of the imagination and the accretion of hard data, a mutual agreement on the workings of the world is written, in the form of natural law.

The scientist entrepreneur can pick a subject virtually at random and soon be on the edge of discovery, if he is at all lucky. In 1962 Robert H. MacArthur and I, both in our early thirties, decided to try something new in biogeography. The discipline, which studies the distribution of plants and animals around the world, was ideal for theoretical research. Biogeography was intellectually important, replete with poorly organized information, underpopulated, and almost devoid of quantitative models. Its borders with ecology and genetics, specialties in which we also felt well prepared, were blank swaths across the map.

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MacArthur was then an associate professor of biology at the University of Pennsylvania, the same rank I held at Harvard. He later moved to Princeton, where he spent the remainder of his short life. He was medium tall and thin, with a handsomely angular face. He met you with a level gaze supported by an ironic smile and widening of eyes. He spoke with a thin baritone voice in complete sentences and paragraphs, signaling his more important utterances by tilting his face slightly upward and swallowing. He had a calm understated manner, which in intellectuals suggests tightly reined power. Because very few professional academics can keep their mouths shut long enough to be sure about anything, MacArthur's restraint gave his conversation an edge of finality he did not intend. In fact he was basically shy and reticent. He was not a mathematician of the first class—very few scientists are, otherwise they would become pure mathematicians—but he joined superior talent in that field with an extraordinary creative drive, decent ambition, and a love of the natural world, birds, and science, in that order.

By general agreement MacArthur was the most important ecologist of his generation. His use of evolutionary theory in the explanation of population growth and competition was so original and productive that biologists today refer informally to the MacArthur school of ecology, or more justly to the Hutchinson-MacArthur school, in order to include his influential teacher at Yale, G. Evelyn Hutchinson. MacArthur died of renal cancer in 1972. Hours before he died in his sleep, I talked with him at length over the telephone, from Cambridge to Princeton. It was the same as ten years before. We touched on familiar subjects: the future of ecology, the key unsolved problems of evolution, and the merits of various colleagues. MacArthur's easy concentration on these matters, as if he had a hundred years to live, was but one more measure of his intellectual integrity.

In 1960, when we first met, I was finishing a ten-year stint of fieldwork and knew the distribution of animals quite well. I had worked out the classification of hundreds of species of ants throughout the Pacific region and elsewhere. I had the sense that there was some general order within the exciting chaos, some powerful process to be uncovered, but only a vague idea of its outline. In our first laconic discussion (MacArthur had the effect on me of shortening my sentences), we quickly realized that something of value lay close to the surface. In the following exchange I have telescoped our conversations and letters on the subject in order to convey the crucial steps in the origin of species-equilibrium theory—almost, as it were, out of the air.

WILSON: I think biogeography can be made into a science. There are

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striking regularities no one has explained. For example, the larger the island, the more the species of birds or ants that live on it. Look at what happens when you go from little islands, such as Bali and Lombok, to big ones, like Borneo and Sumatra. With every tenfold increase in area, there is roughly a doubling of the number of species found on the island. That appears to be true for most other kinds of animals and plants for which we have good data. Here's another piece in the puzzle. I've found that as new ant species spread out from Asia and Australia onto the islands between them, such as New Guinea and Fiji, they eliminate other ones that settled there earlier. At the level of the species, this fits in pretty well with the views of Philip Darlington and George Simpson. They proved that, in the past, major groups of mammals, such as all the deer or all the pigs taken together, have tended to replace other major groups in South America and Asia, filling the same niches. So there seems to be a balance of nature down to the level of the species, with waves of replacement spreading around the world.

MacArthur: Yes, a species equilibrium. It looks as though each island can hold just so many species, so if one species colonizes the island, an older resident has to go extinct. Let's treat the whole thing as if it were a kind of physical process. Think of the island filling up with species from an empty state up to the limit. That's just a metaphor, but it might get us somewhere. As more species settle, the rate at which they are going extinct will rise. Let me put it another way: the probability that any given species will go extinct increases as more species crowd onto the island. Now look at the species arriving. A few colonists of each are making it each year on the wind or floating logs or, like birds, flying in on their own power. The more species that settle on the island, the fewer *new* ones that will be arriving each year, simply because there are fewer that aren't already there. Here's how a physicist or economist would represent the situation. As the island fills up, the rate of extinction goes up and the rate of immigration goes down, until the two processes reach the same level. So by definition you have a dynamic equilibrium. When extinction equals immigration, the *number* of species stays the same, even though there may be a steady change in the particular species making up the fauna.

Look what happens when you play around with the rising and falling curves. Let the islands get smaller. The extinction rates have to go up, since the populations are smaller and more liable to extinction. If there are only ten birds of a kind sitting in the trees, they are more likely to go to zero in a given year than if there are a hundred. But the rate at which new species are arriving won't be affected very much, because islands well away from the mainland can vary a lot in size without changing much in the amount of horizon they present to organisms traveling

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toward them. As a result, smaller islands will reach equilibrium sooner and end up with a smaller number of species at equilibrium. Now look at pure distance as a factor. The farther the island is from the source areas, say the way Hawaii is farther out in the Pacific than New Guinea, the fewer new species that will be arriving each year. But the rate of extinction stays the same because, once a species of plant or animal is settled on an island, it doesn't matter whether the island is close or far. So you expect the number of species found on distant islands to be fewer. The whole thing is just a matter of geometry.

Weeks pass. We are sitting next to the fireplace in MacArthur's living room, with notes and graphs spread out on a coffee table.

WILSON: So far so good. The numbers of bird and ant species *do* go down as islands get smaller and farther from the mainland. We'll label the two trends the *area effect* and the *distance effect*. Let's take them both as given for the moment. How do we know that they prove the equilibrium model? I mean, other people are almost certainly going to come up with a rival theory to explain the area and distance effects. If we claim that the results prove the model that predicted them, we will commit what logicians call the Fallacy of Affirming the Consequent. The only way we can avoid that impasse is to get results that are uniquely predicted by our model and no one else's.

MACARTHUR: All right, we've gone this far with pure abstraction—let's go on. Try the following: line up the extinction and emigration curves so that where they cross and create the equilibrium, they are straight lines and tilted at approximately the same angle. As an exercise in elementary differential calculus, you can show that the number of years an island takes to fill up to 90 percent of its potential should just about equal the number of species at equilibrium divided by the number going extinct every year.

WILSON: Let's look at Krakatoa.

Krakatoa is the small island in the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra that exploded with an equivalent force of approximately one hundred megatons of TNT on August 27, 1883. As a wave raced out across the Indian Ocean (eventually to cause ships to tug at their anchor chains in the English Channel) a blanket of glowing hot pumice covered most of what was left of the island and killed the last remnants of life. Scientists realized that they had a once-in-a-century opportunity to witness the recolonization of a dead island. Between 1884 and 1936 several principal expeditions were mounted under the auspices of the Dutch colonial government to follow the return of plants and animals to Krakatoa. The data were published in a scattering of articles and books, but very little use had been made of them in the years that followed,

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largely because no quantitative theory of island biogeography existed.

The Dutch reported that the vegetation returned to Krakatoa quickly. The first plants sprouted in the rain-moistened ash within a year, and a luxuriant forest covered most of its surface by 1920. Large numbers of animal species simultaneously colonized the island. The journal data were especially good for birds. We got Krakatoa's area and fitted it on our own curve relating area to species. Krakatoa should have thirty bird species at equilibrium. The Dutch surveys indicated that it reached about 90 percent of that number in thirty years. The elementary equilibrium equation predicted that by the late 1920s about one species per year (thirty species divided by thirty years) should be going extinct, to be replaced by one new species coming in. We scanned the pages of the reports eagerly. Would the Dutch scientists mention extinction? They did. They were impressed, they said, by a remarkably high turnover in bird species. We calculated that they saw an average of one extinction every five years. That rate was five times lower than our prediction, but nevertheless much higher than most naturalists expect to find on such islands. And when extinctions and immigrations occurring unseen in the intervals between the surveys were provisionally figured in, the fit to the theory was closer.

Other biologists were encouraged by this mathematically simple attempt to define a dynamic equilibrium. They were intrigued by the very idea that the diversity of life rises to a certain level and stays there, with species coming and going at a predictable rate. The theory could be applied not just to the islands in the ocean but also to "habitat islands," such as woodlots in a sea of grass, ponds and streams in a sea of land, and in fact to any habitat enclosed by a different environment hostile to its organisms. It might even be used to predict the fate of parks and nature reserves over a period of years or centuries.

Species-equilibrium theory, in other words, was heuristic. It promoted further study, a quality highly valued in science. In giving answers to a few old questions, it raised new ones and suggested techniques for their solution. New, more elaborate studies soon proliferated. Mountaintops, lakes, coral reefs, and bottles of water were added to the list of habitat islands under study, while guidelines were suggested for the design of parks. The World Wildlife Fund used some of the models in planning its rain-forest reserve project in Brazil. It was all very exciting, but the first models that MacArthur and I had fashioned were too crude to fit these additional cases. A whole new canon of theory was invented, and appropriate experiments followed. The study of species equilibria grew into a rich and sophisticated branch of ecology. Twenty years later our particular contributions were no longer clearly distinguishable from those of equal or superior merit contributed by other

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biologists. The surviving fragments had been absorbed into the mainstream, which continues to broaden and shift each year.

That is the way of science. The scientist may think like a poet, but the products of his imagination are seldom preserved in their original state. It is often said that a discipline is successful according to how quickly its founders are forgotten—or more precisely, how soon they are replaced in the textbooks and vade mecums of the trade. No original MacArthurs hang in galleries; no biologists return to his original texts in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* to sift for nuance and symbolism. MacArthur lives on as he would have liked, in the irreversible change he caused in an important branch of science.

At the moment the spark ignites, when intuition and metaphor are all-important, the artist most closely resembles the scientist. But he does not then press on toward natural law and self-dissolution within the big picture. All his skills are aimed at the instant transference of images and control of emotions in others. For purposes of craft, he carefully avoids exact definitions or the display of inner logic.

In 1753 Bishop Lowth made the correct diagnosis in *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews:* the poetic mind is not satisfied with a plain and exact description but seeks to heighten sensation. "For the passions are naturally inclined to amplifications; they wonderfully magnify and exaggerate whatever dwells upon the mind, and labour to express it in animated, bold, and magnificent terms."

The essential quality can be rephrased in more modern terms. The mind is biologically prone to discursive communication that expands thought. Mankind, in Richard Rorty's expression, is the poetic species. The symbols of art, music, and language freight power well beyond their outward and literal meanings. So each one also condenses large quantities of information. Just as mathematical equations allow us to move swiftly across large amounts of knowledge and spring into the unknown, the symbols of art gather human experience into novel forms in order to evoke a more intense perception in others. Human beings live—literally live, if life is equated with the mind—by symbols, particularly words, because the brain is constructed to process information almost exclusively in their terms.

I have spoken of art as a device for exploration and discovery. Its practitioners and expert observers, whose authority is beyond question, have stressed other functions as well. In Samuel Johnson's definition, art is to instruct by pleasing. According to Keats, art is to uplift by the refinement of shared feeling. No—moral, the role of art is moral, according to D. H. Lawrence. It is a spell against death, to create and preserve the self, in the formulation of Richard Eberhart. For the more

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prosaic cultural anthropologists, art above all else expresses the purposes of a society. Indeed, affirmation may have been the original evolutionary driving force behind Paleolithic cave art. It was certainly served by the early oral poets of Europe, including the illiterate Homeric bards who recited the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* at festivals and thus transmitted the central myths and legends of ancient Greece. When this cohesive function fails, and tradition and taste fragment as part of culture's advance, criticism becomes a necessary and honored profession. Then we also witness revolutionary art, which goes beyond innovation to promote a different society and culture.

All these functions are variously filled according to circumstances. Nevertheless, art generally considered to be important appears to be marked by one consistent quality: it explores the unknown reaches of the mind. The departure is both calculated and tentative, as in science. The poet focuses on the inward search itself and attracts us to his distant constructions. Something moves on the edge of the field of vision, a new connection is glimpsed, holds for a moment. Words pour in and around, and the image takes substantial form, at first believed familiar, then seen as strikingly new. It is something, as in Thomas Kinsella's "Midsummer,"

> That for this long year
> Had hid and halted like a deer
> Turned marvellous,
> Parted the tragic grasses, tame,
> Lifted its perfect head and came
> To welcome us.

But the poet refuses to take us any further. If he goes on, the precise image will melt into abstract descriptions; light and beauty will congeal into rows of formulas. In this essential way art differs from science. The world of interest is the mind, not the physical universe on which mental process feeds. Richard Eberhart, a keen observer of nature, listened to the same New England birds that led Robert MacArthur to mathematical theories of ecology, and I daresay that the first swirl of imagery, the first tensile pleasures were the same, but the two then diverged, the poet inward and the scientist outward, into separate existences:

> No, may the thrush among our high pine trees
> Be ambiguous still, elusive in true song,
> Never or seldom seen, and if never seen
> May it to my imperious memory belong.

Eberhart holds back, on himself and on us, in order to cast his spell. Again we see that the dilemma of the machine-in-the-garden exists in

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the rain forests of the mind as surely as it does in the American continent. Our intrinsic emotions drive us to search for fresh habitats, to cross unexplored terrain, but we still crave the sense of a mysterious world stretching infinitely beyond. The free-living birds (thrush, nightingale, bird of paradise), being rulers of the blank spaces on the map and negligent of human existence, are worthy symbols of both art and science.

I have emphasized the expansive role of poetry to argue that, whereas art and science are basically different in execution, they are convergent in what they might eventually disclose about human nature. Until recently, science was minimally concerned with the mind. Even those who granted mental process a material origin classified it as an ephemeron, the proper subject of some other occupation, a different way of thinking, a separate literature—in short, the humanities. Now all that has changed. Cognitive psychology has emerged as a strong discipline. Parallel studies on the nervous system and artificial intelligence are contributing further insights. Scientists view the human brain as one of the last remaining frontiers of empirical research. They are beginning to pour in from genetics, molecular biology, and other neighboring disciplines to join its settlement.

The subject of greatest immediate interest is long-term memory. We are essentially what we remember or can remember at some time in the future. People build memory by linking new images and concepts to old ones. In its size, in the space it fills, the mind expands like a coral reef, adding new branches and cross ties out from the edge of those parts already established and anchored, while its central body settles and coalesces. A widely used theory of learning employs a more abstract but equivalent metaphor, the node-link model. The nodes are concepts such as dog, red, bark, aboveground, running, and teeth. Each node is linked to certain others, so that the activation of one in a person's memory tends to pull in a whole group. The image of a dog (or the mere word *dog*) may evoke red, running, aboveground, fur, teeth, and a great deal more: concatenations of memories, frames of node-link structures riffled back and forth through time, and emotional nodes that can only be labeled by broad generic words such as fear and affection. The mind probes and adapts by a process that some psychologists have called spreading activation. Given new images or altered circumstances, it encompasses widening circles of nodes and links in a search for similarities, finally settling on the best categories and analogies previously stored in long-term memory.

Suppose that a strange new animal walks out of the tangled undergrowth and into our view. It might be compared to a dog, or a monkey, or something else. Perhaps the mind, overloaded with its novelty, will

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simply abandon the search, giving the creature a new name and a fuller description than usual in order to establish a new node-link cluster. *This dark furry beast—let us call it X—is smaller than a dog. It has batlike ears, round luminous eyes, and ratlike teeth. It creeps about sluggishly while picking at objects with long spidery fingers. At night it prowls through the treetops and inspires superstitious terror in the few natives who glimpse it by torchlight along the forest trails.* (This particular animal happens to be the aye-aye of Madagascar.)

So now there can be a more explicit description of what theoretical scientists and artists, dreamers of a kind, accomplish during the first stages of original thought. It is controlled growth, a disciplined spread of the mind into hidden recesses where concepts and linkages are still embryonic or nonexistent.

Genius is this kind of expertise born aloft on the wings of energy, daring, and luck. The combination came together in a famous letter sent in 1913 from Srinivasa Ramanujan, a Hindu clerk, to Godfrey H. Hardy, the English mathematician. By the age of twenty-five and with the aid of only one obscure text on higher mathematics, Ramanujan had independently solved some of the problems that previously occupied the best mathematicians of Europe for over a century. A few of the equations were known already: number (1.8) in Ramanujan's series was a formula of Laplace first proved by Jacobi, while (1.9) had already been published by Rogers in 1907. Equations (1.5) and (1.6) looked somewhat familiar and could be confirmed, according to Hardy, but only with a surprising amount of effort. Then came something really new:

> The formulae (1.10)–(1.13) are on a different level and obviously both difficult and deep . . . (1.10)–(1.12) defeated me completely; I had never seen anything in the least like them before. A single look at them is enough to show that they could only be written down by a mathematician of the highest class. They must be true because, if they were not true, no one would have had the imagination to invent them.

They must be true: the same can be said of outstanding achievements in literature and the arts, which pull the rest of us along until the construction becomes self-evident. Eliot wrote that "unless we have those few men who combine an exceptional sensibility with an exceptional power over words, our own ability, not merely to express, but even to feel any but the crudest emotions, will degenerate." The difference in power is one of degree rather than kind, but it crosses a threshold to create a qualitative new result in the same way that a critical speed lifts a glider off the ground into flight.

Research on cognitive development has shown that in the course of

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its growth the mind probes certain channels much more readily than others. Some of the responses are automatic and can be measured by physiological changes of which the individual is mostly or entirely unaware. For example, using electroencephalograms in the study of response to graphic designs, the Belgian psychologist Gerda Smets found that maximal arousal (measured by the blockage of the alpha wave) occurs when the figure contains about 20 percent redundancy. That is the amount present in a spiral with two or three turns, or a relatively simple maze, or a neat cluster of ten or so triangles. Less arousal occurs when the figure consists of only one triangle or square, or when the design is more complicated than the optimum—as in a difficult maze or an irregular scattering of twenty rectangles. The data are not the result of a chance biochemical quirk. When selecting symbols and abstract art, people actually gravitate to about the levels of complexity observed in Smets's experiments. Furthermore, the preference has its roots in early life. Newborn infants gaze longest at visual designs containing between five and twenty angles. During the next three months their preference shifts toward the adult pattern measured with electroencephalograms. Nor is there anything foreordained or otherwise trivial in the aesthetic optimum of human beings. It is easy to imagine the evolution of some other intelligent species in another time or on some other planet, possessing different eyes, optic nerves, and brain—and thus distinct optimal complexity and artistic standards.

We can reasonably suppose that the compositions of artists play upon the rules of mental development that are now beginning to receive the objective attention of experimental psychology. The distinction between science and art can be understood more clearly from this different perspective. The abstracted qualities of the developmental rules of the mind are the principal concern of science. In contrast, the node-link structures themselves, their emotional color, tone, cadence, fidelity to personal experience, and the images they fleetingly reveal, are more the domain of art. Of equal importance to both enterprises are the symbols and myths that evoke the mental structures in compelling fashion. Certain great myths—the origin of the world, cataclysm and rebirth, the struggle between the powers of light and darkness, Earth Mother, and a few others—recur dependably in cultures around the world. Lesser, more personal myths appear in crisis poems and romantic tales, where they blend imperceptibly into legend and history. Through the deep pleasures they naturally excite, and the ease with which they are passed from one person to another, these stories invade the developing mind more readily than others, and they tend to converge to form the commonalities of human nature.

Yeats, in his 1900 essay on Shelley, distinguished between the

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theoretician who seeks abstract truth and the naturalist-poet who celebrates detail. In the universe of the mind, Yeats said, no symbol tells all its meanings to any generation. Only by discovering the ancient symbols can the artist express meanings that cross generations and open the full abundance of nature.

We need not worry about the extravagances of visionary artists, so long as they reveal the deeper channels of their minds in a manner that gives meaning to our own. Each human mindscape is idiosyncratic and yet ultimately obedient to biological law. Like the forest of some newly discovered island, it possesses unique contours and previously undescribed forms of life, treasures to be valued for their own sake, but the genetic process that spawned them is the same as elsewhere. Continuity is essential for comprehension; the imagery chosen by the artist must draw on common experience and values, however tortuous the manner of presentation. Thus in 1919 the American modernist Joseph Stella created "Tree of My Life" to translate his own vaulting optimism into a physical paradise within the mind. Bright tropical plants and animals served as the symbols. He described his feelings that led to the painting:

> AND one clear morning in April I found myself in the midst of joyous singing and delicious scent—the singing and the scent of the birds and flowers ready to celebrate the baptism of my new art, the birds and the flowers already enjewelling the tender foliage of the new-born tree of my hopes.

We are in the fullest sense a biological species and will find little ultimate meaning apart from the remainder of life. The fiery circle of disciplines will be closed if science looks at the inward journey of the artist's mind, making art and culture objects of study in the biological mode, and if the artist and critic are informed of the workings of the mind and the natural world as illuminated by the scientific method. In principle at least, nothing can be denied to the humanities, nothing to science.

Lillian Hellman

1907–1984

Member, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR *Editorial Board, 1972–1978*

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Freud and Literary Biography

RICHARD ELLMANN

ALTHOUGH MANY PEOPLE FIND FAULT WITH FREUD, the horse that they flog is not yet dead. I should in fact maintain that we are all still under Freud's long shadow. Last autumn the American press reported a dreadful crime: a young man, egged on by his mother, murdered his father. The newspapers helpfully explained that the young man had a very prominent Oedipus complex. If we dismiss this as just a journalistic excess, we would do well to remember how hard it is to open our own mouths without registering the effect of Freud upon the language. We converse casually about the sexual proclivities of infants, about sibling rivalries, about dependency upon the mother, about sadomasochistic impulses. When we forget things, we suspect ourselves of having wanted to forget them. We may shun the technical vocabulary of Freud, words such as *ego, superego, id, the pleasure principle* and *the reality principle, the anal, oral,* and *genital stages,* yet we are hardly likely to do without such words as *aggression, anxiety, compulsion, the unconscious, defense mechanism, narcissism, death wish, erogenous zones, fixation, guilt feeling, sublimation, wish fulfillment.* Freud may not have invented most of these words, yet he connected them together and he gave them a special color and shape. And quite apart from terminology, Freud has given us the conviction that a secret life is going on within us that is only partly under our control.

Perhaps no part of society has been more disrupted by the coming of Freud than has the community of letters. During the nineteenth century, literature grew more and more in the habit of claiming autonomy as a privileged and separate subject. Words such as *art* and *artist* took on an extraordinary dignity. Psychoanalysis has disrupted these pretensions in several distinct ways. First, it has argued that we are all, artists and non-artists, involved in the chronic production of symbolic fantasies, in dreams or daydreams, in more or less directed oneirism. This being so,

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artists are not an elite; they are much like other people, at most Rembrandts when the rest of us are only Grandma Moseses. Second, psychoanalysis, an infant discipline, takes over terms such as *Oedipus* and *Narcissus* from age-old literature and to some extent preempts them, so that their literary uses become merely illustrative of larger principles. In fact, the word *Oedipus* now makes us think of Freud, not of Sophocles. That is because psychoanalysis lays claim to an even greater antiquity: Oedipuses were living before Sophocles wrote about him; minds expressed their basic drives before artists seized upon them for subjects. Third, literature becomes something that psychoanalysis fancies it must validate; literature cannot know what it is doing, and in spite of its verbality, cannot speak for itself. It can only offer the practice for which Freud would provide the theory. Fourth, literature, by reason of being without theoretical comprehension of its own processes, uses words in an unconsidered way; it talks of love, when it might be better advised to speak of libido; it speaks of what Byron calls "the gentlemanly vice of avarice" when it might better talk of anal erotism. So its putative revelations are imprecise. Finally, in the nineteenth century we looked to literature, especially to the novel, for news of the human mind; now we turn to psychoanalysis for the news behind the news.

Freud himself was at once respectful and disrespectful of literature. He acknowledged and even insisted that many of his discoveries about the psyche had been anticipated by literary works. In his discussion of Jensen's *Gradiva*, for example, he praised Jensen for just such an anticipation. Jensen, then still alive, was singularly ungratified by such a view of his work. But when Freud considered art at large, he was often (though not always) less laudatory. The writer sublimates his desires, or, as Freud says, "The writer softens the egotistical character of his egoistic daydream by altering and disguising it." Writing becomes a pleasurable cover-up, furtive rather than open, a repression of reality at least as much as it is an expression of it. It conceals neurosis rather than freeing one from it. Qualities that writers have cherished—their aesthetic power, their inspiration and exaltation, their development of previously established forms—have no psychoanalytic standing; they are demystified, or it may be, explained away as results of more basic drives and appetites. Writers fancied they were eagles, and are only clams.

Sensing a challenge, the literary community responded uneasily to the new psychology, especially in an area where it is particularly intrusive, that of biography. Traditional biography has relied upon two kinds of information: documents such as letters, and written or oral reminiscences. These being absent, biographers have often made their surmises or conjectures on the basis of written works. Shakespeare, they think, was a bit like Hamlet as a young man and like Prospero as an old

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one, and books have been written on such speculations. Freud himself was not inhibited by scarcity of documents or oral histories. He took up Leonardo da Vinci's reminiscence of being in his cradle as an infant when a kite came and struck his mouth with its tail feathers. Freud insists that this was not a memory but a dream; he mistranslates *kite* as *vulture*, and on these beginnings offers a psychological sketch that takes in not only Leonardo's childhood but his mature paintings. In the same way, he finds Dostoevsky's parricidal guilt feelings to be the cause of that writer's immediately subsequent contraction of epilepsy. It appears, however, that the epilepsy did not develop until long afterwards. Freud is equally bold with Goethe's childhood memory of throwing crockery out the window. This he traces to the birth of a sibling, and does so quite plausibly, though we don't know whether the crockery was actually thrown at the time of a birth or not. No recent biographer has, I believe, followed Freud's theories of Leonardo, Dostoevsky, or Goethe. But Freud was perhaps just exploring possibilities. He was more resolute about his theory of Moses, though even here he worried that he "was obliged to construct so imposing a statue upon feet of clay, so that any fool could topple it." He was perhaps more interested in the general truth of such psychological patterns than in their accuracy in the particular instance.

Jean-Paul Sartre wrote three huge volumes on Flaubert that took off from a similarly minuscule beginning. Flaubert's niece, Mme Caroline Commanville, wrote in old age about her uncle, and recalled his having confided that he could not learn to read at the age of nine. Unfortunately, we have a letter of Flaubert written just at the beginning of his ninth year, and written very well, in which he speaks of having already written plays. Sartre might have decided that Mme Commanville, writing as an old woman, had confused her uncle with somebody else. But he wants to use her reminiscence, so he decides that she has just made a little slip and remembered that Flaubert said nine when he must have said seven. He then postulates that someone said to the boy of seven, who could not learn his letters, "You are the idiot of the family." (Those familiar with Sartre's writings will recall that in his biography of Genêt he imagines that someone said to the child Genêt, "You are a thief.") So the title of Sartre's biography of Flaubert is *The Idiot of the Family*. Were we to object that the child Flaubert, even supposing that he had trouble learning to read, was in other ways precocious, I cannot imagine Sartre retreating. For, ultimately, Flaubert must be shown to fail in the eyes of his family and, I think we could say, in the eyes of Sartre. And if Sartre lacked the testimony of Mme Commanville, however unreliable that testimony may be, he is quite willing to say that, by observing the effects in the mature Flaubert, we can reason back to the causes in Flaubert the

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child. Given a particular kind of dog's tail, we can deduce a particular kind of muzzle.

The rigorous scrutiny that psychoanalysis offers writers, depriving them of their elite status and sitting as a sort of posthumous authority that takes note of their aberrations and concealments, has roused considerable misgivings among them. There has been no one reponse to Freud. Thomas Mann belauded him. Auden begins "The Orators": "By landscape reminded once of his mother's figure," and we realize we are in the age of Freud. T. S. Eliot's reaction was more mixed: in "The Dry Salvages" he said that "to explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams" is among the "usual / Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press," though in *The Cocktail Party* he included among the characters a benign and unworldly psychoanalyst. Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* speaks mockingly of the time "when we were jung and easily freudened," but he was perhaps the first writer to use Freudian slips in a conscious way: Leopold Bloom speaks of "the wife's admirers" when he consciously means "the wife's advisers" and unconsciously thinks of his own wife's admirer; and his tongue slips again when he speaks of that admirer as his wife's "business menagerer" instead of "business manager." Joyce did not subscribe to the Freud-Jones theory of *Hamlet* as Oedipal conflict, though it fascinated him, and in *Ulysses* he centered a psychological explanation of the play in the feelings of the dead king rather than those of the living son—*Hamlet* without the prince almost. Joyce turned down a suggestion that he be analyzed by Jung, but he allowed Jung to attempt to cure his distraught daughter. In a later generation Ernest Hemingway would revolt against the idea that his works were the result of a psychic trauma rather than of the utmost aesthetic cunning. There are, of course, examples of writers who have been analyzed, such as Doris Lessing and H.D., but other writers have felt that the peculiar synthesis of weakness and strength that constituted their gift would not profit by being anatomized. Erich Fromm advised Conrad Aiken not to risk it.

Of course, writers have always been dubious about putting their lives at the mercy of biographers. They could see that they had much to lose, and probably little to gain, by having their pasts reconstructed without the right of reply. Oscar Wilde remarked that biography "adds to death a new terror, and makes one wish that all art were anonymous." Thomas Carlyle declared that "the biographies of men of letters are for the most part the saddest chapter in the history of the human race except the Newgate Calendar." For while traditional biography was usually animated by a desire to be adulatory or when necessary exculpatory, it could scarcely fail to present details that were irrelevant or perhaps at odds with this motive. The lives of creative writers, as of other men, cannot consist only of moments of victorious self-transcendence and

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transcendence of circumstances, but must include pettinesses and humiliations. Of this Freud was well aware. In 1936 Arnold Zweig offered to write his biography. Freud responded that he was too fond of Zweig to permit it. "To be a biographer," he said, "you must tie yourself up in lies, concealments, hypocrisies, false colourings, and even in hiding a lack of understanding, for biographical truth is not to be had, and if it were to be had, we could not use it." He went on, "Truth is not feasible, mankind doesn't deserve it, and anyway isn't our prince Hamlet right when he says that if we all had our deserts, which of us would 'scape whipping?" So he offers two objections, somewhat self-contradictory: one that biographers tell lies; the other that if they told truths, the truths would be unbearable. He found a discreet biographer in Ernest Jones, who skirted many of those issues that Freud would have dealt with in other men and who, though a psychoanalyst, made no effort at psychoanalysis.

Given such cogent objections, even from Freud himself, to biographical undertakings, we no doubt will find the proliferation of biography in our century astonishing. The advance tremors that dying writers have felt have proved justified. Scarcely has their breath left them when their widows or widowers feel obliged to choose among the outstretched pens of eager memorializers. There is hardly time for mourning; the public's appetite for information must be filled as soon as the grave is. This appetite is not altogether discreditable. We long to understand our world, and imagine we can do so by understanding the vivid personalities within it. We want to bring them back to life, so far as we can. With literary men this impulse is especially understandable, for while television figures—politicians or athletes or newscasters—are people we can recognize like old acquaintances, writers work in such strict privacy and are generally so secretive about their intentions and sources that we look at their lives with even keener interest. We wish that the biographer would explain the mainsprings of genius. Freud acknowledged that the comprehension of genius was beyond his powers, and later biographers, without disclaiming the task, have had less success at it than we hoped.

No doubt we have also, in reading or writing biography, a less noble aim, a gossipy one, to confirm through the details of a life that a gifted man or woman, though in many ways *unlike* us, is *like* us too, subject to the same needs, smelling equally of mortality. We at once want them to present themselves on the same stage that we occupy, and yet—for we have not given up the heroic altogether—we want them undiminished.

Freud understood that his own case histories were close to biographies; he called them pathographies. Yet health and disease are so intermingled by his theory that no one can escape being a potential

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patient. The universality of the pathic is one of his discoveries. His epoch seems based on the aphorism: One touch of kinkiness makes the whole world kin. Normality, healthy sexuality, and similar terms are out of order. The ordinary is as subject to scrutiny as the extraordinary. Freud's case histories are, however, biographies without heroes or villains. They are also biographies without history, for the linear past interests him less than the imaginative past, especially the mythology of childhood that may well be partially invented by the patient to suit his later needs, and that may suddenly obtrude itself quite out of regular order. There is no time in the unconscious, as Freud points out. Whether we saw the primal scene or not, he eventually decided, is irrelevant; we thought we did, we imagined we did, and that is enough. We live among feelings, to which facts may or may not adhere. Biographers have never felt so free of the necessity of distinguishing fact from fantasy.

Towards biography as practiced before his time Freud was severe. He regarded it as based on deliberate concealment. In his essay on Leonardo, he said that the majority of biographers pass over in silence the subject's sexual activity or sexual individuality, and therefore cannot arrive at an understanding of the subject's mental life. On this point he was obviously right. Pre-Freudian biographers were averse to breaking taboos about sexual details. James A. Froude had heard from a close and reliable friend of Jane Carlyle, on her deathbed, that Carlyle was impotent; but in four long volumes of biography of Carlyle, he avoids mention of this point. While novelists, especially in France, were becoming increasingly open about sexuality, biographers were slow to follow, and tended to cling to notions of respectability that novelists were trying to dislodge.

Freud also declared that

> biographers are fixated on their heroes in a quite special way. In many cases they have chosen their hero as the subject of their studies because—for reasons of their personal emotional life—they have felt a special affection for him from the very first. They then devote their energies to a task of idealization, aimed at enrolling the great man among the class of their infant models—at reviving in him, perhaps, the child's idea of the father. To gratify this wish they obliterate the individual features of their subject's physiognomy. They smooth over the traces of his life's struggle with internal and external resistances, and they tolerate in him no vestige of human weakness or imperfection. They thus present us with what is in fact a cold, strange, ideal figure, instead of a human being to whom we might feel ourselves distantly related. That they should do this is regrettable, for they thereby sacrifice truth to an illusion, and for the sake of their infantile phantasies abandon the opportunity of penetrating the most fascinating secrets of human nature.

This is a vehement indictment that Freud makes, though now a little

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out-of-date. I should doubt that modern biographers are fixated on their subjects or look to them for father figures (or even mother figures, a possibility that Freud characteristically ignored). The modern biographer has read Freud, or even if he hasn't, he has absorbed him. He has come to recognize the dangers of fixation and idealization. The biography of Woodrow Wilson that Freud purportedly wrote with William C. Bullitt originated in what might be called counterfixation, an active dislike, as they admit. If a modern biographer identifies himself a little with his subject, he does so reservedly, and withdraws a bit at the same time.

And it must be said that the subject of the literary biographer—the writer—has also become more wary, apprehensive of being psychoanalyzed too easily. An analyst of my acquaintance tells me that he rarely sees among educated people in cities the classic symptoms of hysteria, such as paralysis of an arm or leg, inability to speak or swallow, fainting or convulsions, which were so marked when Freud began to delineate hysteria. Nowadays even hysterics know a cliché. But an Austrian analyst tells me, "In Vienna we have still the classic symptoms." Now that our possession of an Oedipus complex has been dinned into us from our early years, writers are much less prone to present so acknowledged a behavior pattern. Were Sophocles alive today, he would write about someone else than Oedipus. Other discoveries of Freud, such as meaningful slips of the tongue, are grasped at once by the tongue-slipper, not to mention by his auditors, and so seem to bear a reduced significance, as if whatever was being repressed was not repressed very far down. If we have an accident, we know all about accident proneness, though this may not stop the pain. Nor do we fall so easily into the error marked out by Freud of being too hero-oriented. The unheroic interests us too—moments of shabby conduct or symptoms of disease (Freud's own jaw cancer, for example). Biographers are often accused of indecorum, and reply by accusing their detractors of squeamishness.

Our conception of the creative process has undergone such an upheaval that we no longer look, as a nineteenth-century biographer would, for evidence of the taking of infinite pains that genius traditionally is said to constitute. Mere gumption does not impress us. In the last century it was assumed that literary works came into being because their authors willed them to. The modern biographer would question the autonomy of that will. He would be likely to see the writer as the victim of internal compulsions, or familial and extra-familial complications, bursting into literature willy-nilly, writing not to express finesses but, it may be, to exorcise horrors. Henri Michaux, in one of his imaginary voyages, describes how a people whom he calls Les Hacs rear their artists. It might be a parable of our present conception:

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The Hacs have arranged to rear every year a few child martyrs, whom they subject to harsh treatment and evident injustices, inventing reasons and deceptive complications, based on lies, for everything, in an atmosphere of terror and mystery.

Entrusted with this work are some hardhearted men, real brutes, directed by cruel and clever overseers.

In this way they have reared up great artists, great poets, but also, unfortunately, assassins and especially reformers—incredible bitterenders.

If a change is made in the customs and social institutions, it's owing to them; if, in spite of their small army, the Hacs have nothing to fear, again they owe it to them; if, in their straightforward language, lightning flashes of anger have been fixed, beside which the honeyed deviousness of foreign writers seems insipid dog food, it is again to them they owe it, to a few ragged, wretched, hopeless kids.

Art, by these lights, is not the result of virtue but of handicap. Matthew Arnold admired Sophocles for seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. We, on the other hand, admire our writers because they respond with fury and passion to abuse and indignity. The wise contemplative visage of Goethe is not our model, but the hurt, furtive face of Kafka. When Joyce in *Ulysses* has Stephen Dedalus offer us a portrait of Shakespeare, it is not the swan of Avon, serenely regarding the human scene, but a vengeful cuckold writing out of anger and jealousy. I think we can attribute to Freud the way that our biographical attention has been directed away from the perfection of artifacts and onto the imperfection of artificers. Yeats reminds us that all the artistic ladders start in the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart, and the rag-and-bone shop is what we want to examine—not the empyreal loft to which the ladders go. Robert Lowell, an imperfect poet, wrote in a late poem that imperfection is the language of art. Sartre conceives of Flaubert as saying to himself, "Loser wins," as if only through defeat in life is victory in art possible. The writer gets his own back by writing.

If we try to isolate the features of modern biography, the first is its heightened sensitivity. I think we can attribute this in large part to Freud. The biographer conceives of himself not as outside but as inside the subject's mind, not as observing but as ferreting. Facts do not speak for themselves. We model ourselves on Freud, analysts without couches. What Freud instructs us, as Philip Rieff observes, is to recognize all experience as symptomatic. Trivia have as much to tell us as crises. We should all like to collect telltale slips of tongue or pen, for example, although these are not so easy to find as perhaps *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* makes them seem. We live in what Paul Ricoeur in his book on Freud calls the age of suspicion; we do not so much present as arraign. Sartre, in writing of Baudelaire, as in writing of Flaubert, often seems the prosecuting attorney, when an earlier biographer would have been attorney for the defense.

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The conviction that everything is relevant is somewhat destructive of chronology. The nineteenth century could view a life as a progress from primitive childhood to civilized adulthood, followed perhaps by the return to primitivism in dotage. But Freud makes us recognize that linear development may not describe the psyche adequately, that *Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action, may suddenly project the being into new areas, as hitherto suppressed parts of the self manifest themselves. The ahistorical unconscious is constantly obtruding into the historical layers of the mind. Moreover, the unity of the self is likely to be relinquished by the biographer in favor of a more protean entity. Like the wizened Christ child in some early Italian paintings, we are born old. Sexualized from birth, ridden by undirected or half-directed fantasies, we have no time to grow up even if we have the will. Sartre suggests that a life is simply a childhood with the stops pulled out; but it might well be a childhood with many of the stops pushed in even further. Our seeming selves are only palimpsests under which may be dimly perceived features successfully or unsuccessfully repressed. If we persist in regarding the self as in some sense one rather than many, we have still to allow for what Sartre calls its carousel of motives moving about the pool of its central ipseity.

The lesson of our sexual nature that Freud inculcates has been learned almost too well. The word *Freudian* had become a synonym for *sexual*, although Freud makes clear in his essay "'Wild' Psycho-Analysis" how wrong this is, because repression is an essential part of sexuality. The nineteenth-century reticence of which he complained is hard to discover in our contemporary behavior. We are quite prepared to make our sometimes naive deductions from what we can find out about bedroom quirks. That Ruskin's moral fervor derived in large part from his sexual fears, and that Carlyle's pungency compensated for sexual impotence, are near commonplaces of biographical interpretation. The latest biographies of Fitzgerald and Auden not only discuss their mating habits but their genital sizes. We are all prepared to acknowledge what Freud called somatic compliance, the body's submission to the mind, as well as its opposite, the mind's submission to the body. Even Yeats says, "Our bodies are nearer . . . to our 'unconscious' than our thoughts." On the other hand, when Sartre says that Flaubert's maternal grandfather, after the death of his wife in childbirth, took revenge upon the newborn infant by sickening and then dying himself, we become skeptical, especially when we discover that his death did not occur until ten years later. What protracted vindictiveness! Psychoanalysis may also relieve our envy of sexual athletes; their success may be as pathological as the more-common unsuccess. Don Giovanni is not sensual, he is sick; he needs a hospital, not a hell. Maybe.

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The effect of our newfound methods of detection is vast and unpredictable. The unknown need not be the unknowable. To paraphrase Freud, where obscurity was, hypothesis shall be. In this sense, paucity of information may even be an advantage, because it frees the mind for conjecture. The early years, to which psychoanalysis attaches so much importance, are just those about which we know least. But there are mysteries throughout. Where direct evidence is missing, we have to rely on outside testimony. The witness of friends or relatives may or may not be helpful. A recent collection of taped interviews with friends of Wallace Stevens is proof of how little his friends knew him. Of course, there are always letters. The modern biographer is aware that the letter is itself a literary form, through which writer and recipient play a game of concealment and revealment. What we have to read in correspondence is what is not written there, as at a party we notice who has not been invited. For earlier biographers, letters were saints' relics; for biographers since Freud, they are likely to be duplicitous or at least incomplete.

In presenting his subject, a biographer agrees with Freud that we must be skeptical of heroics. We have always known, even without Freud's help, or La Rochefoucauld's, that our virtues are often vices in disguise. Now the existence of virtue is itself almost in question. In Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* the last temptation of Thomas à Becket is that of martyrdom. We cannot even die for a cause without worrying that it may be just a means of self-aggrandizement. Self-sacrifice is another virtue that has lost much of its earlier prestige. Oscar Wilde connected it with the self-mutilation of savages. The appetite for suffering is one of which Freud has made us intensely conscious. The concept of sadomasochism has put to flight many seemingly virtuous acts. For, what Freud tells us, though he never said so explicitly, is that the stomach hunts the ulcer.

Just as virtues have taken on a little viciousness, so vices have lost some of theirs. The vice of extravagance is such a failing. Questionable as a method of household economy, it may be defensible when applied to literary innovation. Joyce regarded himself as guilty of both kinds. Drunkenness may be reprehensible in itself, but as a control over schizophrenia, as Jung said Joyce used it, it may have its merits. Abysses of shyness and evasion may underlie dogmatism; inner firmness may be concealed under wobbling and waffling. Lautréamont said of his fearful book *Les Chants de Maldoror* that he had, indeed, like Byron, Baudelaire, and others, sung the praises of evil. "Of course I exaggerated a bit in order to make an original contribution to the kind of sublime literature that only sings of despair in order to depress the reader and make him long for goodness as a remedy." Beckett's work proceeds somewhat

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differently; it undercuts despair by saving humor, and undercuts saving humor by unsalvageable despair. All that is certain is uncertainty. Contradictory impulses may coincide; as Freud tells us, there is no *no* in the unconscious. Lacan points out, "What the unconscious forces us to examine is the law according to which no utterance can ever be reduced simply to its own statement." When Yeats asks whether he believes in that farrago of occultism and philosophy and poetry that he calls *A Vision*, he seems to reply that he both does and doesn't, and that the question of belief may not belong to our age, and that truth can be embodied in a poet's life but not known. George Eliot, in a sentence admired by Henry James, spoke of "the suppressed transitions which unite all contrasts." Freud's term *reaction-formation* indicates how we may repress a wish by doing the exact opposite of it. The modern biographer recognizes that every motive is a multiplicity of motives, many of them in conflict; as Michaux says, we are born of too many mothers.

We must infer that biography has plunged into a new phase. At the same time, many biographies are not written in full awareness of what has been happening. The responsibilities of this kind of subtle and devious interpretation are so manifold that few practitioners rush to take them all on. Their failure to do so is not reprehensible. For one thing, the information they have about matters that are crucial for Freud is often scanty, and they may be reluctant, understandably, to introduce their own speculations as if they commanded equal attention with known particulars. Another is that the tracing of ultimate causes may reduce differentiation: the biographies of Woodrow Wilson by Freud and Bullitt, of Martin Luther by Erikson, and of Flaubert by Sartre, all make so much of their Oedipal complexes and their relation to God the Father, that the president, the religious reformer, and the writer might almost be confused with one another. The unconscious is a great melting pot. Even Freud sometimes apologizes for the repetitiveness of certain psychological patterns, and a biographer who depends heavily upon them is likely to create a stereotype instead of a person.

It seems likely that certain patterns made available by psychoanalysis may have a blurring effect. For example, among the character traits isolated by Freud is the anal erotic. Edmund Wilson attributed this quality to Ben Jonson. It could as easily be attributed to Ernest Hemingway. For Hemingway, unlike his prodigal friend F. Scott Fitzgerald, was always gathering, absorbing, hoarding, withholding. He prided himself on his secrets, and his method of writing was to offer information as sparingly as possible. "You'll lose it if you talk about it," says Jake in *The Sun Also Rises*. For Hemingway writing was a kind of suppression with only partial release. He behaved in life as in his art,

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going without food to save money, then engaging in some gush of expense, but all the time keeping a money heap in reserve. His capacity for retention extended to keeping his early notebooks in bank vaults for many years, for future exploitation. Even his method of composing a paragraph in circles around key words suggests a peristaltic movement. Though he wanted to be known as swashbuckling, his strength came from self-concealment. His well-known competitiveness was as much as anything an attempt to protect his winter stores.

A biographer of Hemingway will certainly wish to present this character trait. But the fact that it was presumably shared by Ben Jonson—so different a writer—may make us less cocky about what we have found. Could it be that anal erotism is pretty general among writers? They are usually inclined to be thrifty, to build up reserve supplies, to play ant rather than grasshopper. But one thing is sure: the daring innovation in Hemingway's style, its fanatical economy, like the humor and lyricism of Ben Jonson, may be disparaged by offering it in the context of anal erotism.

Another post-Freudian situation arises in biography when the biographer shapes, to the point of distortion, the facts at his disposal in accordance with Freudian theory. Henry James, as is well known and confirmed by love letters to a man, was predominantly homosexual. Freud offers several explanations of homosexuality, including a genetic one, but the one he expounds most prominently, as in his essay on Leonardo da Vinci, is that the homosexual is fixated on the mother. (Freud later regretted that he had had so little to go on in this essay.) In Leon Edel's biography of James, Edel searches for evidence that James's mother "smothered" her son Henry. Unfortunately the evidence is lacking, and almost all the testimony he gives—from friends, relatives, or Henry James himself—appears to differ with this conclusion. Of course, one can still say that it is true without evidence. In an area where witnesses are so hard to come by, speculation can be rife. An aphorism of our time for Freudian biography might be: If you can't see it, it must be there. Still, caution is necessary if we would persuade others.

It has required the assurance of Jean-Paul Sartre to carry out a full-scale biography of the modern kind. Though not by any means an orthodox Freudian, since he finds the unconscious to be conscious, he still keeps largely to Freudian patterns. He has little to say of Flaubert's feat of remaking the novel, partly because he is suspicious of literature; in particular, Sartre is contemptuous of late nineteenth-century literature, which he calls an "art-neurosis" engineered by the Knights of Nothingness, whose ideals he finds to be antihuman. Flaubert was a Knight of Nothingness, and Sartre's interest is in showing how he came to be one. I have already mentioned the slender memories to which he

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often attaches so much weight. When questioned as to how he knows something about Flaubert, he has the assurance to reply, "Well, I've read Flaubert." And though he insists that life and work should not be equated, he does equate them again and again. For example, he relies heavily upon patterns he claims to find in Flaubert's early stories. When he has to allow that these stories are common ones of the period, very much to hand for Flaubert, he counters by asking why Flaubert—faced with many common stories—picked these particular ones. The argument is conducted with great force and wit. Still, it is not quite so convincing as he imagines. In the stories, for example, he is particularly eager to find instances of sibling rivalry. Usually in the stories the older brother is triumphant, thus confirming Sartre's conjecture that Flaubert felt victimized by his elder brother. But in one story the younger brother is triumphant. Sartre is not fazed: he announces that this time Flaubert has just "shuffled the cards." But of course, the question arises, Why didn't he shuffle the cards some more? And if shuffling the cards is to be conceded, then how do we know that the other stories, in which the older brother is triumphant, are not the ones that have been shuffled the most? I think that we know enough about the creative process to insist that the erect pen has no conscience, that Flaubert may well have imported details from other lives rather than from his own, or just tried his hand at a story that he had happened to hear or read recently. There is always the possibility, which occurs to the reader as Sartre completes his accusatory case against his subject, that Flaubert's family life was quite different from the nightmare version Sartre conjures up. Sartre offers Flaubert no liberty, keeps him on a tight leash, binds him hand and foot, fetish and phobia. With certain presuppositions about family life, largely based on Freud, Sartre can prove his case over and over again. His eloquence about the unknown is staggering. The flimsier the documentation, the more he has to say. When facts are mentioned, they come as a relief. Substitutions are everywhere: about one of Flaubert's stories Sartre insists that the father is really the mother, and the mother the father. (Later on he says that Flaubert's father mothered him after his breakdown at Pont l'Évêque.) He has also the family romance at its most intense; not only does son murder father but father murders son. This is grand stuff, and we wish it could be confirmed.

I think that Sartre exemplifies the merits and demerits of modern biographical method. On the one hand, thanks to Freud, we have been alerted to all sorts of complexities in the personality. On the other hand, these can be interpreted so variously that it is hard to establish firm footing. Where everything can stand for its opposite, where fantasies and facts intertwine, we look desperately for a position in time and space. Freud is supposed to have said that there are times when a cigar is just a

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cigar. But how to recognize these tranquil moments of simple identity?

That Freud makes biography difficult does not mean that he should be put aside. Biographers need a depth psychology, and Freud, with his followers and deviationists, offers one. Conceptualizing a life is different from living it; experiences cannot be simply transcribed onto paper without filtering them through an alien consciousness. Perhaps we should be gingerly in applying Freud's theories, for it is when they are most ostentatious that they awaken the most uneasiness. Yet if Sartre runs too fast, not to run at all would be craven. A modern biographer is bound to attend to incursions of the irrational upon the rational, to look for unexpected connections and unsuspected motivations. For all this Freud remains a model, though no doubt a tricky one.

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The Vanishing Point

(New Year's Day 1984)

PETER DAVISON

Snow crept up overnight as we slept
and powdered the surface of the earth so lightly
the footpaths stirred, as smooth as dusted skin.
An uncut beard of grass darkened the field.
I had awakened to the shimmering landscape
from a sleep sunk in sullen dreams, entombed
in the companionship of friends long dead
who accelerated along gravel country roads
or city streets crammed with traffic
toward no end anyone would have wanted to reach.
Their destination was a point deeper than ever
in the closed and unforgiving past
where love enacts its remorseless guzzling.

This morning, though, was dusted with the present
as though brushed by the smoky fragrance
of sleep. It held there for the moment.
No wind stirred up the snow along the branches,
no wheel crushed down a snowflake on the road.
This present moment, exquisitely poised,
had not yet given in to the scramble of time
but seemed to hold itself back from moving on
out of a night which hurtled in drunken zigzags
through one of the dreams where we are never alone.
Carried by trains, motorcycles, elevators,
we are always passengers, always companioned,
sniffing out the smelly trails of childhood,

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flaunting a thousand newly-sewn disguises.
Where those dreams take us, no matter how eager
their search, they never end in arrival.

Now the present is inching toward the future.
At the silent feeding station chickadees chirp.
Over the marsh black air flourishes flecks
of irregular white, more snowflakes, *storme still.*
The sky as it unbends relents a little
and grows lighter. A dog barks in protest
at the iron day, indignant at its silence.
The perfection of this morning hour has yielded,
without anticipation, to the fact
that time is coasting forward, turning momentum
into the new year's elliptical glide.

Poised on the incoming day, between tides
of sleep and waking, I ride on the waters of time,
whose movement, steady as the orb of earth,
makes only one general statement: *Change is all.*
The weather system, the troubling dreams of travel,
a scrap of geography discarded here
in the glacial scree of leftover landscape—
these happenings seek no end, no destination.
Each moment wishes us to move farther on
into a sequence we can follow at most
to vanishing point. We can see no farther,
though time seems to pause and wait for us at times
and measure us and move along again.

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A Good School

DIANE RAVITCH

IN THE NOT DISTANT PAST, when attitudes toward public education were strongly positive, it rarely occurred to anyone to seek out examples of "effective schools." The evident assumption was that most schools were good, and that the ineffectual school was an aberration. The first annual Gallup poll about public schools in 1969 showed a strikingly high regard for schools and the teaching profession; three out of four persons responded that they would like to see their children take up teaching as a career. The level of public esteem for the schools at that time was even more remarkable in light of the overwhelmingly negative tone of the popular literature on schools in the mid-1960s.

After a decade of strident attacks on the schools, a decade in which public confidence waned, a small number of educational writers and researchers started looking for examples of good schools. There had long been a tradition of writing about a particular school as a way of trumpeting certain values that the school embodied, but the climate of the times tended to define the "good school." In the Progressive Era, certain schools were singled out because of their anti-traditional features, such as their combination of work and play or their engagement in the social life of the surrounding community. In the 1960s, certain schools were lauded for their political activism or their success in "liberating" children from bourgeois values.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, an "effective school" came to be identified with the characteristics set out in the writings of the late Ron Edmonds of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Perhaps because Edmonds was black, he was able to assert values that would have sounded disturbingly traditional to the educational establishment if voiced by a white. Edmonds identified schools where academic achievement seemed to be independent of pupils' social class, and he concluded that such schools had an outstanding principal, high expectations for all children, an orderly atmosphere, a regular testing program, and an emphasis on academic learning.

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Edmonds's conclusions may have seemed like a series of commonplace observations to most people, but they were received as stunning insights in the arcane world of educational policy. (Outsiders are repeatedly astonished by what passes for revelation in the education field; for instance, one of the great discoveries of recent years—though still not universally accepted—is that student achievement may be positively related to something called "time on task." In other words, what one learns is determined in part by the time spent learning it.) Happily, Edmonds was not alone in his interest in learning as the major measurement of school quality. Other studies reinforced his view that student achievement could be raised by sound educational practices. To appreciate the importance of this change in orientation, one must recall the many years in which academic achievement was treated with disdain in comparison with non-academic goals.

Writing about a single school is also a good way for a writer to test his own educational ideals and to display them for public inspection. Now, in the interest of candor, I confess that I instinctually hew to John Dewey's admonition: "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely." The best and wisest parents, I expect, want their child to read and write fluently; to speak articulately; to listen carefully; to learn to participate in the give-and-take of group discussion; to learn self-discipline and to develop the capacity for deferred gratification; to read and appreciate good literature; to have a strong knowledge of history, both of our own nation and of others; to appreciate the values of a free, democratic society; to understand science, mathematics, technology, and the natural world; to become engaged in the arts, both as a participant and as one capable of appreciating aesthetic excellence. I expect such parents would also want a good program of physical education and perhaps even competence in a foreign language. Presumably, these mythical best and wisest parents want their child to have some sense of possible occupation or profession, but it seems doubtful that they would want their child to use school time for vocational training, at least in the pre-collegiate years.

That our public schools have long operated on contrary assumptions should be obvious. The program I have described is usually called the academic track, and not more than 35 to 38 percent of American secondary students were receiving this kind of well-balanced preparation in the early 1980s. Acting not *in loco parentis* but on behalf of the state, educators have sorted children into vocational or general tracks, the former to prepare for a specific job, the latter being neither academic nor vocational. For reasons that are rooted largely in misplaced compassion—not in meanness or ignorance—our educational philosophy has

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dictated that academic learning is not for everyone; that it is too demanding for the average student; that its apparent inutility limits its value to the average student; that too much of it will cause students to drop out of high school in droves; and that such students should take courses that provide job skills, life skills, practical know-how, and immediate relevance to their own lives.

In public schools, curricular tracking has become a common practice. By tracking, I refer to the academic/vocational/general trichotomy, not to ability grouping. Ability grouping permits students to take different amounts of time to reach roughly similar goals; tracking offers students vastly different kinds of educational programs. The practice of tracking raises all sorts of questions: Who decides which students go into the academic track? At what age does the tracking begin? To what extent is the decision to funnel a student into a non-academic track a response to his parents' occupations and social class? Should the public school—supported by taxes from all citizens—have the right to determine that some students will receive an education of high quality while others will get a denatured version?

To such questions, which go to the core of our democratic ideology, the defender of the present system might well respond: "Such naiveté! Dreams of perfection! In a perfect world, where all children have the same genetic and cultural inheritance, such a scheme of high-quality education for all might make sense. But in reality, children differ dramatically. Some come to school already knowing how to read, others can barely decipher words after six years of trying. Some are brilliant, others struggle to master the rudiments of learning. The smart ones are clearly college-bound and should have an academic curriculum. The others should have courses where the level of challenge is not too high, where they can have a feeling of success. And more than subject matter, what the majority needs most is vocational training to get them ready for the workplace. That is what they want, and they should get it. Let us not forget that the great achievement of modern educational research has been the recognition that the curriculum must be adjusted to meet the differing needs of children."

For years, such views have represented the conventional wisdom in public education. The school that I have selected as an example of an effective school—the Edward R. Murrow High School of Brooklyn, New York—explicitly rejects these views. Its principal, Saul Bruckner, is a product of the public schools as well as a twenty-seven-year veteran of the New York City public school system. I learned a great deal by spending time in his school; I changed some of the ideas I brought with me. I am not sure that I agree with every practice and program in the school, but I deeply admire its tone and its high academic aspirations for

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all its pupils. I think what Bruckner is doing deserves attention, not because it is the only way or even the best way, but because it is one successful way of wedding traditional goals with non-traditional means.

Murrow was opened in 1974 and officially designated an experimental school by the New York City Board of Education. Its 3,000 students are drawn from the borough of Brooklyn. Half of the students are white, and half are members of minority groups. One of the many unusual features of the school is that it treats all of its pupils as college-bound. No one is tracked into a vocational or "general" program. Yet the school is purposely composed of children with a broad range of abilities. By board of education mandate, at least 25 percent of Murrow's entering students read below grade level; no more than 25 percent read above grade level; and the remaining 50 percent read at grade level. There is no entrance examination, but competition for admission is vigorous; last year, there were some 9,500 applicants for 800 places in the entering class. Critics complain that special schools like Murrow "cream away" the best students from other public high schools, but about one-fourth of Murrow's enrollment consists of students from parochial and independent schools whose parents had previously rejected the public schools. Student morale is undoubtedly lifted by awareness of the difficulty of gaining entry into Murrow. The very process of applying makes every student a committed participant in his own education and eliminates the handful of unwilling students who otherwise make school life an ordeal for teachers and other students. Since Murrow has the luxury of not admitting those who have a well-established record of truancy, disruptive behavior, or criminal activity, it occasionally gets pilloried by detractors as "atypical," but the school may instead demonstrate that mixing those who want to learn with those who don't want to learn is no favor to either group.

Even though the students at Murrow represent a wide ability range, all are expected and required to take a strong academic program in order to graduate—that is, a minimum of five academic courses throughout the school year. The academically gifted take more than five, and there are advanced placement courses in every subject area. The New York City school system requires one year of a foreign language, but most students at Murrow take three or four (the school offers Spanish, French, Latin, Hebrew, and Italian). Similarly, most students take more than the required two years of science and mathematics. Advanced science students may enroll in a sequence that includes six years of science; weak science students may take astronomy or horticulture instead of the rigorous course in physics. All must take at least four years of English, including a year of writing instruction, and three-and-a-half years of social studies. This level of academic engagement stands in stark

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contrast to the figures reported by national surveys. For example, only about 15 percent of American secondary students study *any* foreign language; only 6 percent of the nation's students finish a third year of foreign language study, but at Murrow at least 65 percent do. When compared to national enrollment rates in subjects like algebra, geometry, and the natural sciences, Murrow looks like a private school instead of a public school made up of a broad cross section of pupils.

The students who read two or more years below grade level receive intensive remedial instruction in reading and writing while still enrolled in regular courses. The school does not exclude average or below-average students from any of its upper-level courses, as many schools do. Consequently, even advanced placement courses in English, social studies, mathematics, and science contain a diverse range of students, and occasionally teachers complain about students in their advanced placement class or the calculus class "who don't belong there." But the school's philosophy is that no student should be discouraged from taking on an academic challenge. Unlike many other public schools, Murrow does not practice grade inflation (20 percent of all its grades last year were "no credit," the equivalent of not passing the course) or social promotion (no one graduates until all of the academic requirements are met, and some students take longer than four years to finish).

The academic results of the Murrow program have been impressive. The annual dropout rate is only 4 percent, compared to a citywide rate of 11 percent. Daily attendance averages 88 percent, far above that of other urban high schools. Nearly 90 percent of its graduates continue to either a four-year or a two-year college program. The school urges even those who intend to be secretaries to take a degree at a community college in order to enhance their occupational mobility later. The chairman of the social studies department, Mary Butz, explained to me on my first visit to the school, "The climate of the school is middle-class Jewish. These kids all believe that education will help them get ahead, move up into college and good jobs. They have bought the whole package. They believe in themselves, and they believe in us."

How can Murrow get away with its ambitious program? Well, for one thing, its students have been persuaded that Murrow is a very special school and that they are very special students. The school year and the day are organized somewhat differently than they are at a more traditional school. Instead of two semesters, there are four cycles of ten weeks each. The principal believes that the advantage of four ten-week courses is that students are encouraged to take risks, knowing that they won't be stuck for an entire year (or semester) with a bad choice. Instead of every subject meeting daily, the time is divided into four weekly meetings; this gives the students some blocks of optional time that they

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can use as they wish, either to study, do homework, or socialize with friends. Unlike the students at most other schools, students at Murrow are permitted to cluster in the halls during their optional time, and affinity groups have claimed different territories (none based on race, however). "Over there are my theater groupies," says Bruckner. "And those kids are the science groupies." As we walk through the hall, he sees a Hispanic girl curled up on the tile floor, deeply engrossed in a paperback book. "What's that you're reading?" She holds up the book, and he reads: "Richard II." In the English "resource center" (like a study hall), a group of youngsters works together on a project. In an otherwise empty classroom, half-a-dozen boys are setting up a videotape camera, part of a project for their literature course, "Detective Story." In the computer center, two or three students share a single machine, figuring out problems together, teaching each other.

Murrow represents an ingenious answer to the question: How do you enlist students' interest in their education without giving them control of the curriculum? Murrow does it by setting high requirements for graduation, but the school permits students to meet those requirements by choosing among a carefully designed mix of required and elective courses. The required sophomore course in American literature, for example, focuses on textual analysis of major poems, novels, and plays. Whether required or elective, all academic courses include homework and writing exercises. The many ten-week elective courses have jazzy titles, but fairly traditional readings; for example, students in "Youth and Identity" read Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Carson McCullers's *A Member of the Wedding*, Paul Zindel's *The Pigman*, and Elie Wiesel's *Night*. Students in "Novel into Film" read *The Great Gatsby* and *Great Expectations*. Many electives are unabashedly classical, like the Shakespeare class that reads *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II*, and *Othello*, or the advanced placement course that reads the works of Milton, John Donne, Ben Jonson, Jane Austen, and other great English writers.

In reviewing the literary offerings available to Murrow students, I could not help but contrast them to my own public school education in Texas. Although it is customary to lament the decline of public education, I believe that Murrow is a far better school than my alma mater in Houston. The literature curriculum of San Jacinto High School was uniform and limited. I recall a year of British fiction that never moved beyond *Silas Marner* and *Julius Caesar*. I have no idea why this selection was inviolate for so long, especially since I believe that such books as *Pride and Prejudice* or *Emma* or *Great Expectations* are wonderfully appealing to adolescents, while few adolescents have the maturity to appreciate George Eliot's complex prose.

Wisely administered, electives enable a school to provide what I

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would call the illusion of choice. Students do, in fact, make choices, but "wisely administered" means that they should not be permitted to make bad choices, like junk courses without academic merit ("Bachelor Living" or "Personal Grooming"). The illusion of choice can be readily adapted to the English sequence because the traditional English I through English VIII (which I took in my four years of public education) can easily be rearranged and attractively packaged. Thus, a course called "The Woman Writer" appeals to the modern sensibility, but is a fine setting in which to teach the works of Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Charlotte Brontë, and "The Literature of Social Protest" turns out to be a good marketing tool for the works of writers such as Orwell and Dickens.

Where the repackaging can work neatly for the English curriculum, it has proved to be nearly a disaster in the undisciplined realm of the "social studies." This field—once dominated by history—is now rootless and very nearly formless. Among social studies educators, the phrase "chronological history" is frequently used as a term of derision. Even courses entitled "American History" are likely to eschew the traditional narrative of events, leaders, ideas, and institutions in favor of themes, topics, and trends. A significant portion of the Murrow social studies curriculum reflects the political and social fragmentation of the past generation, as well as the disorganization of the social studies as a field. There is a required course in American government, concentrating on political institutions, and a required course on American diplomatic history, presenting the history of America's foreign policy, but most other courses are either specialized excursions into some thematic "experience" (the word "history" is usually avoided) or overly broad, like "the global experience." While history is in retreat, psychology, economics, and law studies are thriving: a student, for example, may choose from among eight different psychology courses (for instance, Social Psychology, Abnormal Psychology, Developmental Psychology, the Psychology of Aging).

Despite my reservations, the social studies program at Murrow is far stronger than at most schools. For one thing, there are no contentless courses in "values clarification," "process skills," or "decision making"; second, while the catalogue contains the feminist "Herstory" and "The Black Experience," there is otherwise no further ethnic or group fragmentation of the curriculum. Perhaps most important, the department includes some gifted teachers, who have before them at all times the example of their principal, Saul Bruckner, himself a master teacher of American history. He is frequently in classrooms, observing, prodding, and instructing other members of the staff to enliven their presentations and teaching styles. Under his critical gaze, the course "Origins of Western Civilization" really is a treatment of Western civilization

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from ancient Rome to the Renaissance, and the "Isms" course turns out to be a history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe.

I ought to explain how I happened to learn about this school. I was involved in sponsoring a conference in Minneapolis in the spring of 1984, on behalf of the National Endowment for the Humanities, on improving the teaching of the humanities in the high schools. The opening speaker was a distinguished social historian, who discussed the problem of integrating ethnic diversity into the common culture. It has been my experience that public discussions of ethnicity, especially among educators, invariably are pervaded by a sanctimonious tone. Everyone speaks reverentially of the nobility and struggles of oppressed minority groups, and the air becomes heavy with guilt and piety.

During the coffee break, a young teacher grabbed me by the arm to tell me, in an unmistakably Brooklyn accent, that an American Indian woman—known in current bureaucratic language as a Native American person—had just assailed her in scatological language. "What?" I said. "What? How can this be?" "Well," she said, "this Indian woman asked me if she could use the bathroom, and I told her that the bathroom was reserved for conference participants. So, she used the bathroom anyway. When she came out a few moments later, she jabbed her finger in my chest, called me by an odious term, and warned, 'White woman, don't mess with me anymore.' "

Her name card said, "Mary Butz, Edward R. Murrow High School, Brooklyn, New York." Charmed by her indifference to the demands of ethnic piety, I asked her to tell me about her school. She said, with what I later learned was characteristic candor, that it was the best school in New York City, because it had the best principal and "the greatest kids." I was startled, because over the years, I have met so many embittered teachers in the New York City school system, people who recall or have heard of the school system's reputation in another era, an era when the New York City public schools were widely recognized as pioneers and when their students were pressing hard for future greatness as literati or scientists.

Naturally, I wanted to see the best school in New York City, the best principal, and the greatest kids, particularly because I had been in so many high schools that seemed like armed camps and in so many subway cars at the end of the school day when high school students used their raw energy to intimidate everyone else. So not many days later, I trekked out to the Midwood section of Brooklyn to find an undistinguished, nearly windowless modern brick building, set in the midst of a pleasant middle-class neighborhood. An example of incredibly stupid planning, the Murrow building abuts elevated subway tracks (the noise of passing trains regularly disrupts classes) and has no surrounding

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campus, although the students are able to use another school's athletic field across the street.

As it happened, on the day that I arrived, Bruckner was teaching an advanced placement section of American history. There were about thirty youngsters in the class, and the question for the day was: "Was it moral for the U.S. to drop the atomic bomb on Japan?" Something inside me warned that I was in for a session of moralistic Truman-bashing, but I was wrong. The students (some of whom were Oriental) had read the textbook description of the war. When I entered, the class was discussing the incidence of cancer in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Then Mr. Bruckner used an overhead projector to display contemporary news stories from the *New York Times* and the *Herald Tribune*. One headline told the human cost of capturing Okinawa: forty-five thousand American casualties, ninety thousand Japanese casualties. How many lives might be lost in an invasion of the mainland? A mimeographed handout discussed Japanese kamikaze raids and brutality toward American prisoners, which gave the students a flavor of Japanese and American wartime attitudes. A fair conclusion, which did not involve prejudice toward our Japanese adversaries, was that they would fight ferociously to the end. Lest anyone jump to the easy conclusion that the decision to drop the bomb was moral, the teacher also displayed comments by generals and revisionist historians who felt that dropping the bomb was not necessary to end the war.

The lesson was taught in a Socratic manner. Mr. Bruckner did not lecture. He asked questions and kept up a rapid-fire dialogue among the students. "Why?" "How do you know?" "What does this mean?" "Do you really think so?" Sometimes he called on students who were desperately waving their arms, other times he solicited the views of those who were sitting quietly. By the time the class was finished, the students had covered a great deal of material about American foreign and domestic policies during World War II; they had argued heatedly; most of them had tried out different points of view, seeing the problem from different angles. It was a good lesson: it was well planned, utilizing a variety of materials and media; and the students were alert and responsive.

Bruckner's lesson was at odds with the usual characterization of American teaching. In the past year or two, most critics of the schools have complained about the quality of teaching. Educators like John Goodlad of UCLA and Theodore Sizer, a former headmaster of Andover Academy, have asserted that there is too much "teacher telling," too much student passivity, and little if any thought-provoking activity in the typical classroom. A major study prepared for the National Institute of Education a few years ago contended that teaching in American schools

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has remained unchanged—that is, boring and teacher-dominated—throughout the century. Well, I thought to myself, I have seen one great teacher; what happens in the other classrooms?

I visited many classrooms and observed teachers in every subject area. I saw some outstanding teaching, some passably good classes, and a few that failed, but in no instance did I see a teacher droning on to a class of bored students. The teaching style in the building was remarkably consistent, and every teacher used materials and experiences that were outside the textbook. In the best classes, the focus of the lesson was on the intellectual exchange sparked by the teacher and kept alive by student participation. In one literature class, the students debated O. Henry's use of language to establish the tone of a story; in a chemistry class, thirty-five students jointly figured out the answer to the question, "How does a battery operate?"

I later learned that Bruckner requires all his teachers to use what is called the "developmental lesson" or the "socialized recitation." If they do not know how to teach this way when they are assigned to Murrow, they are taught the method by their department chairman. At its best, it works magnificently: students listen, speak out, think, disagree with each other, change their minds, make judgments. For this method to work, two things are necessary: first, the teacher has to be well prepared, having planned out the lesson in advance with an "aim" or problem to be solved, with pivotal questions to provoke student discussion, and with materials (a political cartoon, a newspaper headline, a quotation from a participant or critic, or an excerpt from a book) to stimulate new lines of inquiry; second, the students must bring something to the lesson in the way of reading or homework, so that they can respond to the teacher's questions with ideas and insights of their own. If the teacher does not prepare well and if the students are uninformed, the developmental lesson can dwindle into a vapid exchange of uninformed opinion, of less value than a traditional didactic lecture.

Bruckner's biggest problem is building a good teaching staff. Within the context of the public school bureaucracy, this requires consummate skill. When Bruckner opened Murrow in 1974, he was officially permitted to select only 35 percent of his staff. Because he was a veteran of "the system," he was able to play the teacher-selection game like a Stradivarius, and he ended up with a staff in which about 70 percent of the teachers were of his choosing. He might encourage a skilled teacher to apply to join his staff, who would then not be counted as one of his "picks." Since the school opened in the midst of the city's fiscal crisis, Bruckner was able to hire many talented young teachers who had been laid off by other schools. Among the 30 percent or so that he did not choose were, inevitably, some lemons. It is possible, but not easy, to fire

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a probationary teacher (one who has taught for less than three years); it is nearly impossible to oust a tenured teacher. "A principal can't fire a teacher simply because he is boring or incompetent or even when you know that he treats the kids like dirt," Bruckner says. "He must be grossly negligent, persistently late for class, drunk in class, something like that."

What a principal can do, however, is lay off staff, but only in order of seniority. One principal, Bruckner says, wiped out most of his English department to get rid of a teacher with fifteen years of seniority; seven able young teachers were laid off in order to drop a bad senior teacher. Bruckner closed down his guidance department in order to remove the person assigned to Murrow. Eventually, the Brooklyn superintendent for high schools ordered him to hire guidance counselors, and he continued to hire and lay off until he got the people he wanted. Usually it is easier to lay off personnel than to go through the procedure of ousting them. Not only is it time-consuming, but if the principal wins, the teacher is stripped of his license. It is akin to having a lawyer disbarred, with this exception: the teacher can get a license in another area. For example, Bruckner had the licenses revoked from two probationary teachers, one who taught the handicapped (special education), another who taught social studies. Before long, both were reinstated. The ex-special education teacher had become an elementary teacher, and the ex-social studies teacher had moved into special education. "Well," Bruckner says with resignation, "I didn't get them out of the system, but I got them out of this school."

Bruckner speaks with passion about how the structure of public education contributes to the "infantilization" of teachers. "Teachers," he complains, "have little responsibility for the conditions of their working lives. We call teaching a profession, but if so, it is the only profession in which there is no opportunity for growth while remaining in the profession." The teacher has lost a great deal of authority to make decisions, not only to supervisors, but also to their own organizations and to federal, state, and local mandates. "For most of the important things in their day," Bruckner says, "teachers depend on someone else. Someone else assigns them a room, someone else gives them a daily schedule, someone else writes their lesson plan." Yet in the classroom they have total control, and no matter what the official course of study says, the teacher defines the curriculum every day. Outside the classroom, however, the teachers "are like students: they have very limited say over their lives, and that creates bitterness and hostility." To break through this "infantilization," Bruckner encourages teachers to design their own courses and to take more responsibility for school affairs. Perhaps the most promising innovation has sprung from the science

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department, where teachers visit one another's classrooms and discuss content and methodology; their professional critiques of one another take the place of an official observation by a supervisor. Bruckner hopes that other departments will follow suit: "Doctors observe each other practice and learn from one another; so do lawyers. Why shouldn't teachers?"

Like other big-city high schools in the 1980s, Murrow is constantly threatened by financial pressures. Average class size is now up to thirty-four in the city's high schools, the largest in many years. The library is funded at only one dollar per year per student; half of the library budget pays for the *New York Times* on microfilm and its index, leaving only $1,500 for books and magazine subscriptions. At today's prices, $1,500 does not buy much of either. In order to continue using a diversity of materials and media in the classroom, which is integral to the lively approach that Bruckner advocates, the school has heavy expenses for equipment, supplies, and repairs. Occasionally, he has traded in a teaching position (valued at $33,000) in order to maintain the school's Xerox machines, mimeograph machines, computers, overhead projectors, and audiovisual equipment.

The school has a climate that is relaxed and tension-free. Teachers and students alike know that they are in a good school, and this sense of being special contributes to high morale. Yet the tenuousness of the authority structure of a big school was revealed to me one morning when the principal was away at a conference mandated by the board of education. Word spread through the building that the police bomb squad had closed off part of the second and third floors, and it was true. Students milled in the corridors, elaborating on the rumor. An assistant principal announced on the public address system, "Everyone return to your classroom. There is no danger at the present moment." Since the police had sealed off a major portion of the building, most students had no classroom to return to. In the absence of sensible adult instructions, nearly half of the students went home. The surprising thing, Mary Butz observed, was not that so many left, but that so many stayed, because the bomb scare had effectively ended the school day.

Schools cannot function as they once did. Teachers cannot presume to have the respect of the students. They have to win it in the classroom. Many New York City school teachers have found it difficult to adjust to the loss of authority over the past generation and the change in the pupil demography from predominantly white to predominantly black and Hispanic. Some professionals in the New York City public schools labor with a sense of nostalgia for a lost golden age, a time when student motivation could be taken for granted and when teachers were respected figures in the community. This image of a lost golden age is a mixture of

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truth, misty memories, and historical accident. The Great Depression was a time when many over-educated teachers entered the school system because there were no jobs in higher education or the professions; when there was an unusual number of second- and third-generation Jewish students who were eager to use their education to get ahead; and when the less-motivated students dropped out to work as elevator operators or messengers or in some other low-skill job.

Life was hard for most people during the Depression, but in many ways it was not as complicated for school people as it is today. Many of the children at Murrow, who come from a broad mix of racial, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, bear the scars of social dissolution. While trying to educate them, the school cannot ignore the family crises, the broken homes, the child abuse, the parental negligence that cuts across all socio-economic lines. In other urban schools, the wounds that families inflict on their children are far worse. Sometimes the best that a school can do is to provide a sympathetic adult who will listen.

Bruckner knows that the school competes for the child's attention with the pathology outside its doors, with the lure of television, drugs, sex, and the adolescent culture. He has not created a social service program; the school is not a social work agency. What he has tried to do is to make it a place where adolescents feel at home, a place that they might want to come to even if they didn't have to. He has done this, not by turning the school into a playing field with low hurdles, but by harnessing non-traditional means to traditional academic goals. The smart kids have no ceiling on their ambitions; they can go as far and as fast as their brains will take them. Not many public schools in the nation can match Murrow's advanced courses in science and mathematics. But this richness for the bright students is not achieved by pushing the average ones into nursing and automobile mechanics. All of them have available a strong basic curriculum and a diversity of learning opportunities that enable them to learn at their own pace, and all are accorded equal respect as students.

There are many different kinds of effective schools. Some of them, like Murrow's neighbor in Brooklyn, Midwood High School, are highly structured and traditional. Visiting Midwood is like stepping into a school in the early 1950s; it is quiet and orderly, and the students seem serious and purposeful. What effective schools have in common should be available to all American students: a strong academic curriculum, a principal with a vision and the courage to work for it, dedicated teachers, a commitment to learning, a mix of students from different backgrounds, and high expectations for all children.

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"Supposing History Is a Woman—What Then?"

GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB

"SUPPOSING TRUTH IS A WOMAN—WHAT THEN?" This sentence of Nietzsche's may well be the most tantalizing opening of any philosophical text. It is also the prelude to one of the most arresting images in philosophy. The philosopher pursuing truth, Nietzsche explains in *Beyond Good and Evil*, is like an earnest, clumsy man trying to win over a woman. But just as woman has always resisted such heavy-handed attempts at seduction, so truth has always resisted the importunities of philosophers, which is why philosophical dogmas always end up in a state of disarray. The philosopher's "will to truth" has proved as unavailing as the fumblings of an inept suitor. Only the "free spirit" has the strength of will to abandon this unseemly quest and liberate himself from the "tyranny" of truth as from any other tyranny. For he knows that whatever else woman wants, "she does not *want* truth."

> What is truth to woman? From the beginning, nothing has been more alien, repugnant, and hostile to woman than truth—her great art is the lie, her highest concern is mere appearance and beauty. Let us men confess it: we honor and love precisely *this* art and *this* instinct in woman: we who have a hard time and for our relief like to associate with beings under whose hands, eyes, and tender follies our seriousness, our gravity and profundity almost appear to us like folly.

Nietzsche's image recalls another that is no less provocative. The English philosopher Michael Oakeshott would seem to have little in common with Nietzsche. His philosophical roots are in Hegel, his political roots in England, a combination that makes him the very antithesis of Nietzsche. Yet we are irresistibly reminded of Nietzsche in the image that provides the climax to one of his most interesting essays, "The Activity of Being an Historian." Toward the end of that essay Oakeshott tells us that the historian "adores the past," but that the world cannot understand that kind of love.

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It [the world] deals with the "past" as with a man, expecting it to talk sense and have something to say apposite to its plebeian "causes" and engagements. But for the "historian," for whom the past is dead and irreproachable, the past is feminine. He loves it as a mistress of whom he never tires and whom he never expects to talk sense.

That essay was first published in 1955 when it was still possible—but only barely possible—to use such sexual imagery. Even then, however, it was provocative, as much for the implication that history made no "sense" as for the image of the beloved mistress whom one "never expects to talk sense." With each reprinting of the essay in *Rationalism in Politics* (in 1962, 1974, and 1981), the implication and provocation became greater. In Oakeshott's latest work, *On History*, the image does not appear, but the idea evoked by it is essentially the same. Today, with Oakeshott emerging as a major figure in English philosophy, and with history itself being transformed, methodologically and substantively, by all the varieties of the "new history," Oakeshott's views are more pertinent than ever. (Oakeshott has been described as "simultaneously historian and philosopher." But while he started his career as lecturer in history at Cambridge, he has never written any work of history.)

The image of the mistress appears toward the end of "The Activity of Being an Historian," following an analysis of the three modes of experience corresponding to three modes of history. The practical mode of experience is that which occupies most of us most of the time; it is the realm of cause and effect, necessity and accident, good and bad, and whatever other concepts are needed to understand our world in relation to ourselves. The scientific mode understands these concepts, especially cause and effect, in another sense, not in relation to ourselves but independently of ourselves, "objectively," as is said. The contemplative mode is typical of the poet or artist who sees in the world not signs or portents, causes or effects, but only " 'images' of delight," images which may be real or fictitious—the distinction is irrelevant to him—and which call neither for his approval nor for his disapproval.

The same modes govern our attitudes to the past. As there are different presents, so there are different pasts and different ways of viewing the past. Indeed all pasts are constructions made out of the present, the present world providing the evidence for past events. Yet there are distinctive attitudes toward those events. The practical attitude interprets the past in relation to the present, reading the past backward from the present (or from a more recent past), seeking in the past the origins of whatever appears in the present, judging the past in terms derived from the present. The scientific attitude tries to understand the past by subsuming individual events under general laws, so that the past it deals with is not the real past but a "timeless world, a world, not of

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actual events, but of hypothetical situations." The contemplative attitude is exemplified in its purest form in the historical novel, where the past is neither practical nor scientific but a "storehouse of mere images."

While most historians display in their work a combination of these attitudes, Oakeshott also finds a single attitude unique to them. The kind of statements historians (but not others) sometimes (but not always) make about the past is neither practical, scientific, nor contemplative. In the specifically "historical" attitude, the past is not viewed from the perspective of the present (or of a more recent past). No event is placed, judged, explained, or criticized in relation to later events. No evidence is excluded, nothing is irrelevant, whether or not it "contributed" to later history. A pope cannot be said to have "intervened" to change the course of events; his action was part of the course of events, hence not an intervention. Nor did a king "waste" his resources in "useless" wars; the wars were what they were, part of the actual course of events, not of some imaginary course of events which would deem them wasteful and useless. "In 'history' no man dies too soon or by 'accident'; there are no successes and no failures and no illegitimate children."

The historical attitude resembles the scientific in being neither practical nor present-minded. But unlike science, history has no room for the kind of general causes that are inherent in the scientific enterprise. If there are no "accidents" in history, neither is there anything in history that is "necessary" or "inevitable"—concepts implicit in the idea of general causes. The historian knows no general causes that are the necessary and sufficient causes of war; he knows only the particular course of events which makes a particular war not accidental and not inevitable but simply "intelligible." Nor is the historian's attitude truly contemplative, although it is sometimes reminiscent of that attitude. For the historian, unlike the historical novelist, sees past events as "facts" rather than mere "images."

It is an austere and difficult regimen Oakeshott imposes upon the historian, requiring him to think about the past in ways that are utterly foreign to his usual ways of thinking about the present. Not only must he refrain from assimilating the past to the present, from making the past inform the present or the present the past, he must also refrain from understanding the past in terms that have generally been thought necessary to make the past itself intelligible—in terms of cause and effect, beginnings and ends, accidents and necessities. The historical past is so complicated, Oakeshott finds, so entirely composed of contingencies, that it has no "unity or feeling or clear outline," no "over-all pattern or purpose." The only intelligibility it has is that given it by the "circumstantial relations" established by the historian. Each piece of historical writing is an independent exercise, a picture drawn to its own

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scale, eliciting a "coherence in a group of contingencies of similar magnitude." There is no single picture that may be said to be "true" to the exclusion of all others; there is only a multitude of "coherences" of different orders and on different scales.

This conception of the historical enterprise is in one sense exceedingly modest, aspiring to no large visions or enduring truths, producing only a kaleidoscope of changing pictures. In another sense, however, it is enormously ambitious, for it requires the historian to resist the overwhelming tendency of all time, and of the present time most especially. It is at this point that Oakeshott introduces the metaphor of history as woman.

> The "historian" adores the past; but the world today has perhaps less place for those who love the past than ever before. Indeed, it is determined not to allow events to remove themselves securely into the past; it is determined to keep them alive by a process of artificial respiration or (if need be) to recall them from the dead so that they may deliver their messages. For it wishes only to learn from the past and it constructs a "living past" which repeats with spurious authority the utterances put into its mouth. But to the "historian" this is a piece of obscene necromancy: the past he adores is dead. The world has neither love nor respect for what is dead, wishing only to recall it to life again. It deals with the "past" as with a man, expecting it to talk sense and have something to say apposite to its plebeian "causes" and engagements. But for the "historian," for whom the past is dead and irreproachable, the past is feminine. He loves it as a mistress of whom he never tires and whom he never expects to talk sense.

If the reader has so far been lulled into acquiescence by a subtle and powerful argument, this passage may well give him pause. As, no doubt, Oakeshott intended. Even in 1955 it was not quite the thing to refer to a woman as someone whom one "never expects to talk sense." Nor was it less provocative to speak of a historian doing what most historians have always done as engaged in an act of "obscene necromancy." Oakeshott's boldness may embolden his reader. If the conventional historian seeking to resuscitate the dead is guilty of necromancy, Oakeshott himself may be charged with the no less obscene perversion of necrophilia, having sexual relations with the dead. For the past, Oakeshott's mistress, whom he adores and who never talks sense, is—he leaves us in no doubt about this—irrevocably, if also irreproachably, dead.

There are no such titillating images in Oakeshott's recent volume of essays, *On History*, perhaps out of regard for current sensibilities. His essential thesis about history is the same as in the early essay, but it is developed more soberly and systematically, in prose that is all too often dense and abstract (as when a situation is described as "transformed by being understood as the outcome of an uncovenanted circumstantial

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confluence of vicissitudes"). It is with relief that one comes upon the occasional metaphor, such as the "dry wall" constructed by the historian, a wall created by placing the stones of events in such a fashion that they are held together by shape and contiguity rather than by mortar. At another point the historical work is said to resemble not a jigsaw puzzle in which fixed pieces are fitted together so as to constitute a picture, but rather "ambiguous echoes which wind in and out, touch and modify one another . . . more like a tune (which may be carried away by the wind) than a neatly fitted together, solid structure."

Both of these metaphors are meant to convey Oakeshott's sense of the "evanescence" of the historical enterprise. But they contradict each other in interesting ways. The "dry wall" is, in fact, a solid structure that will not be carried away by the wind, not even, if it is at all skillfully constructed, by a severe storm. Indeed, it has a good deal in common with the jigsaw puzzle that Oakeshott eschews, the stones having fixed shapes and the wall created from them also having a fixed (although not necessarily predetermined) shape. The conventional historian might well seize upon this metaphor to describe his own enterprise, which depends not upon the artificial use of mortar to make the facts adhere in an arbitrary manner, but rather upon the selection and connection of facts that come together easily and naturally. Oakeshott's distinctive idea of history is more accurately conveyed in the second metaphor—the "ambiguous echoes" resembling a tune that at any moment may be dissipated by the wind.

To appreciate the full implications of this idea of history, to see it in its most radical and uncompromising form, one must return to Oakeshott's first major work, *Experience and Its Modes*, published half a century ago (and republished twice since, most recently in 1978). The chapter "Historical Experience" makes many of the same points as the later essays—about cause and effect, accident and necessity, origin and development, the practical mode and the scientific. But the thesis is even bolder. Whatever "truth or validity" adheres to history, we are told, does not derive, as the conventional historian might assume, from an "objective" world, a world of past events waiting to be discovered and reconstructed by the historian. For there is no such objective world, no historical events independent of the experience of the historian, no events or facts which are not also ideas. "History is the historian's experience. It is 'made' by nobody save the historian; to write history is the only way of making it." The function of the historian is to make coherent a multitude of past acts and events, and this coherence alone defines historical truth. "To be true is to belong to a coherent world." There is no essential difference between the facts or "texts" of history and the historian's interpretation or "experience" of them. In a memora-

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ble sentence, Oakeshott anticipated the latest and most modish of literary theories: "The text is the interpretation and the interpretation is the text."

If Oakeshott (and this account of him) so often seems to blur the distinction between the two meanings of history—history as the past and history as writing about or reflecting upon the past—it is because this is his intention. "No distinction whatever can be allowed between the raw material of history and history itself, save a distinction of relative coherence. There is no fact in history which is not a judgment, no event which is not an inference. There is nothing whatever outside the historian's experience." So far from celebrating a past that is past and finished, Oakeshott here actually rejects the conception of a "dead past." Such a past, one that has no links to the present and is totally differentiated from the present, "suffers from a fatal defect: it implies that history is not experience."

> A fixed and finished past, a past divorced from and uninfluenced by the present, is a past divorced from evidence (for evidence is always present) and is consequently nothing and unknowable. If the historical past be knowable, it must belong to the present world of experience; if it be unknowable, history is worse than futile, it is impossible. The fact is, then, that the past in history varies with the present, rests upon the present, is the present.

The historical past, then, rather than being irrevocably past, seems to be irrevocably present, and this even when it has no "practical" import. It is present simply because it is a form of experience and all experience is in the present. "Its facts are present facts, its world a present world of ideas." And whatever "coherence" may be given it by the historian is necessarily part of that "present world of ideas."

Earlier in the chapter we are confronted with a paradox that "must be taken absolutely": the paradox that "the historical past is not past at all." "It is not merely that the past must survive into the present in order to become the historical past; the past must *be* the present before it is historical." By the end of the chapter that paradox has made of historical experience a "defective mode of experience." Caught up in a "radical contradiction" between a historical world whose specific and distinctive characteristic is that it is in the past, and a historical experience that is necessarily in the present, history is fatally flawed. From the perspective of the "totality of experience," historical experience is "an arrest in experience and a renunciation of the full, unmitigated character of experience." It is "a failure and consequently an absolute failure." It is "a backwater, and, from the standpoint of experience, a mistake." It "leads nowhere," and the path to satisfactory experience can be regained "only by superseding and destroying it."

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There is no suggestion, in Oakeshott's later essays, that he meant to repudiate or significantly alter this chapter of *Experience and Its Modes*. (He twice reissued the book unchanged.) But there is an interesting shift in the argument. For where the earlier discussion concludes in a radical critique of history, on the ground that there is no historical past and that the past as experienced by the historian is always and necessarily implicated in the present, the later essays attack those modes of history, especially the practical, which do not respect the inviolable pastness of the past. In "The Activity of Being an Historian," Oakeshott affirms that there is a "specifically 'historical' past" and a specifically historical attitude toward that past. This attitude is relatively modern, "the product of a severe and sophisticated manner of thinking about the world." At best it gives rise to a "tentative and intermediate kind of intelligibility," a dream-like history "without unity of feeling or clear outline." But such as it is, it is possible and it is available to us. The same message emerges from *On History*, where we are assured that "historical understanding is not a hopeless enterprise doomed to succumb to distraction," that "the circumstances of perception and the self-understanding of the subject may go some way towards promoting and protecting the integrity of the undertaking." Again, it is a tenuous and ephemeral understanding that awaits us. But it is not a hopeless undertaking—and not, as in *Experience and Its Modes*, a futile and radically defective form of experience.

If the difference between *Experience and Its Modes* and the later essays is not to be explained in terms of an "early" and "late" Oakeshott, it may perhaps be attributed to the different nature of the works. The book, a metaphysical treatise, looks at history from the point of view of the "totality of experience," and in that light judges it to be an "arrest in experience," hence an "absolute failure." The essays, concerned with history as a practical enterprise, an "activity," have a different standard of judgment. From this perspective history is seen to be commonly flawed but not irredeemably so, and the historian, alerted to those flaws, is encouraged to make the best he can of imperfect materials in an imperfect medium.

This reading of the essays makes Oakeshott a critic of history in the tradition of Herbert Butterfield. Yet it is curious that, except for one passing reference (in *On History*), Oakeshott does not mention Butterfield's Whig *Interpretation of History*—perhaps because his own critique went so much further than Butterfield's that he did not want the two to be equated or confused with each other. Published in 1931, two years before *Experience and Its Modes*, and reprinted twice before "The Activity of Being an Historian" appeared, Butterfield's little book has long been the most influential critique of the practical, present-minded,

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progressive, judgmental mode of history; indeed its title is the accepted, shorthand description of that mode. Although Butterfield himself took the Whig historians as the classic exemplars of the "Whig interpretation" or "Whig fallacy," the concept is now understood generically to apply to any present- or future-minded reading of the past. The fallacy, as he describes it, has two sources: the distortions that come from the processes of selection, abridgment, generalization, and interpretation that are inevitable in the writing of history; and the natural tendency to read the past in terms of the present—to select, abridge, generalize, and interpret in accord with the knowledge of hindsight and the predisposition of the historian. In both respects the fallacy pertains to the writing of history, not to the past itself. And while Butterfield adjures the historian to be wary of that fallacy and to avoid it as far as possible, he does not take it as vitiating the independence and integrity of the past. The evidence of the past, the historical record, is inadequate and inaccurate, and the historian's use of it inevitably aggravates these flaws. But the past itself is real and objective, and it is this past that the historian tries to discover and reconstruct. If the ideal always eludes him, it never ceases to inspire him.

On the surface this may also be taken to be Oakeshott's message. But only on the surface, for the past as Oakeshott sees it is not only past but dead and buried, so that to disinter it is to recover dry bones that threaten to disintegrate and ashes that blow away with the wind. Oakeshott is not so much cautioning the historian against the Whig fallacy as cautioning him against the past itself; indeed the very idea of a past purged of its presentness appears to him as a fallacy. And because the past is so tenuous, the writing of history becomes not only difficult, as it is for Butterfield, but almost impossible. This is evident in the list of subjects cited by Oakeshott as instances of the fallacy of present-mindedness. Some of the items on that blacklist are familiar to us from Butterfield's interdictions, and while the historian may find them hard to avoid, he can understand and respect the reasons for distrusting them:

> King John was a bad King.
> The death of William the Conqueror was accidental.
> The evolution of Parliament.
> The development of industrial society in Great Britain.
> The Factory Acts of the early nineteenth century culminated in the Welfare State of the twentieth century.

Others, however, are so restrictive as to inhibit almost all historical discourse:

> The loss of markets for British goods on the Continent was the most serious consequence of the Napoleonic Wars.

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The effect of the Boer War was to make clear the necessity for radical reform in the British Army.

By the time the reader gets to the one historical text cited in praise, an extract from F. W. Maitland, he has become so sensitive and suspicious that he may find even this passage tainted by the vice of present-mindedness and an appropriate candidate for the blacklist:

Towards such a theory English law had been tending for a long while past, very possibly the time was fast approaching when the logic of the facts would have generated this idea. . . . Still this principle had not been evolved. It came to us from abroad.

The skepticism induced by Oakeshott's view of history is so unmitigated, the inhibiting effect it has (or would have if taken literally) on the practice of history so devastating, that one can hardly face up to it. Perhaps this is why even Oakeshott's admirers have shied away from its real import. R. G. Collingwood, for example, praised *Experience and Its Modes* for vindicating the "autonomy of historical thought" and making the historian "master in his own house." He was not entirely happy with Oakeshott's insistence upon the absolute presentness of the past: because the past is to some extent present, he pointed out, this does not prevent it from also being past. But he saw this as a minor "limitation" in a theory that is "full of hope for the future of English historiography."

In fact, the most striking thing about Oakeshott's theory is how little "hope" it holds out, either for the future of English historiography or for the past. There is no future in it because it is more a prescription for the non-writing of history than for the writing of it; and there is no past because it illegitimizes almost the entire corpus of historical writing. Oakeshott himself criticizes another theory of history for being defective on two counts: it is a kind of history that "has never been written" and that "never could be written." The second he takes to be the critical defect, the first a suggestive although not conclusive one. In Oakeshott's case that first defect, the fact that his own view of history is of a kind that "has never been written," is even more critical than the fact that it is of a kind that "never could be written." For on other occasions he himself has assigned a paramount importance to the given, to what is and has been as opposed to what might or should be.

Whatever philosophical or epistemological status Oakeshott gives to history, one might expect him to treat the practical discipline of history, the "activity of being an historian," in the same fashion as such other practical activities (to cite his own examples) as poetry, cookery, and horse racing. The others he subjects to the test of "practical knowledge," of experience and tradition in contrast to theory or "reason." In the essay

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that gives the title to the volume *Rationalism in Politics* (the same volume in which "The Activity of Being an Historian" appears), Oakeshott deplores the fallacy of "rationalism" that is the peculiar and insidious heresy of modernity. Yet in being so dismissive of the "practical knowledge" of history, in ignoring the experience, practice, and "art" of real historians, in imposing upon them restrictions that even the greatest of them have never imposed upon themselves, in setting up as an ideal a kind of history that "has never been written," Oakeshott may be guilty of the fallacy of rationalism that he himself has so brilliantly diagnosed. And rationalism, as he has also pointed out, is the prelude to anarchism.

It is interesting that both *Rationalism in Politics* and *On History* contain essays entitled "The Tower of Babel." They are totally different essays, the first criticizing the pursuit of moral perfection, of rational, conscious moral ideals, the second the pursuit of material perfection, the total gratification of material and sensory ideals. In both cases the enterprise degenerates into chaos because it substitutes a utopian rationality for the practical reality of habit, custom, and tradition. So too, it may be argued, an ideal of historical "activity" entirely divorced from any kind of history that has been written or could be written is an invitation to historical nihilism; it signifies the death of the past and the futility of any meaningful writing about the past.

Nietzsche, curiously enough, proves to be less a nihilist, in this respect at least, than Oakeshott. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche ridicules the philosopher who courts truth as a fumbling suitor might court a woman. In *The Use and Abuse of History* he criticizes the historian who courts history in the same clumsy, ineffectual manner. The philosopher is inept because he does not realize that the object of his affections "does not want truth," and because he himself is not enough of a "free spirit" to resist the tyranny of truth; the historian because he misunderstands the "use and abuse" of history, and because he is not strong enough to master history instead of being mastered by it.

"Only strong personalities," Nietzsche tells us, "can endure history; the weak are extinguished by it." To understand and profit by the past, one must live fully in the present. It takes a man of experience and character to write history. "He who has not lived through something greater and nobler than others will not be able to explain anything great and noble in the past." The historian who burrows in the past because he has no confidence in the present, who thinks he has to empty himself of his "subjectivity" in order to understand the past "objectively," who believes that the proper disposition with which to approach any event in the past is by not being "affected at all" by it—he makes of history a

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"harem" presided over by a "race of eunuchs." And to the eunuch "one woman is the same as another, merely a woman, 'woman in herself,' the Ever-unapproachable." Because he is unable himself to make history, history remains for him "beautifully 'objective.'" Incapable of being drawn upward to the "Eternal Feminine," he draws it down, making history as "neuter" as he is. Uncomfortable with the "Eternal Masculine," he emasculates history by associating it with the "Eternal Objective."

"We do need history," Nietzsche insists, although not the variety cultivated by the "jaded idlers in the garden of knowledge." "We need it for life and action, not as a convenient way to avoid life and action, or to excuse a selfish life and a cowardly or base action." And it can promote life and action—but only up to a point. Beyond that point, it becomes enervating and destructive. "We must know the right time to forget as well as the right time to remember, and instinctively see when it is necessary to feel historically and when unhistorically." Rightly understood, history serves living man in three ways: in his "action and struggle," his "conservatism and reverence," and his "suffering and his desire for deliverance." These three purposes correspond to three kinds of history: the "monumental," dwelling upon the greatness of the past; the "antiquarian," connecting the individual with a "we"—a town, people, or civilization—larger than himself; and the "critical," passing judgment upon the past, explaining what is worth preserving and what is not. Each has its abuses as well as its uses, monumental history tending to glorify a mythical past, antiquarian history to preserve a trivial past, and critical history to destroy the past by an excessive zeal for criticism. But the worst abuse is the emasculation of history by eunuchs who are themselves emasculated and have no more use for history, the kind of history that would truly animate "life and action," than they have for women.

Nietzsche's is a severe indictment of history but not a fatal one. And it is history that is under indictment—a way of thinking and writing about the past, not the past itself. For Nietzsche the past has a real and independent existence, however difficult it may be for the historian to discover it; and the past is a vital part of the present, however rare the historian who can properly appreciate it. So far from being dead, the past is very much alive, sometimes all too much alive. The test of the good historian is to know when to remember and when to forget, when to embrace the past and when to disengage from it. "This is the point that the reader is asked to consider: that the unhistorical and the historical are equally necessary to the health of an individual, a community, and a system of culture."

A feminist may take as little satisfaction from Nietzsche's sexual

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imagery as from Oakeshott's; but the historian may take more. Oakeshott's historian, for all his talk of adoring and loving the past (and loving her as a man loves a mistress rather than a wife), seems to be capable of loving her only after she is dead. And he does so not even in the illusion that she is alive or in the hope of resurrecting her, but knowing that she is dead and loving her because of that. Even Nietzsche did not anticipate so macabre an obsession. The worst perversity he could imagine was the historian who was as impotent in dealing with real history as with a real woman, who was "neither man nor woman, nor even hermaphrodite, but mere neuter."

"Supposing history is a woman—what then?" That supposition has often been made, starting in antiquity with Clio, the muse of history. (But then all the muses, of science as well as art, were feminine, and it was only in late antiquity that Clio became differentiated from the muses of poetry, comedy, tragedy, and the rest.) Schopenhauer, who, according to Nietzsche, was the real nihilist, denying life as well as truth, was all too willing to think the worst of Clio. "In addition to the above-mentioned imperfections of history," Schopenhauer wrote, "there is also the fact that Clio, the muse of history, is as thoroughly infected with lies and falsehood as is a common prostitute with syphilis." Oakeshott's mistress is no prostitute; she is "irreproachable." But while she does not tell lies, neither does she talk sense. (The metaphor gets mixed here, since she is also dead and therefore presumably incapable of talking either sense or nonsense.) Only Nietzsche pays Clio the compliment of thinking her capable of telling, not the truth—there is no truth in history any more than in philosophy—but something important about the past and therefore about the present.

Nietzsche's muse turns out to be unexpectedly modest, sensible, even domesticated, one that most historians may find more congenial than Oakeshott's. If the historian can learn to dispense with absolute truth, to pursue not "woman in herself" but a real woman, not the chimera of the "Eternal Objective" but the reality of something only partially knowable, he can love the past and live happily with her—quite as if she were a beloved wife instead of an adored mistress.

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The Making of a Proust Scholar

PHILIP KOLB

Although Time is the principal theme of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, it may seem hard to justify a scholar's devoting half a century of his own time to delving into the "temps perdu" of a writer. Yet that is precisely what was involved when I undertook to edit Proust's correspondence.

In retrospect, I cannot claim to have exercised good judgment in selecting Marcel Proust as the subject for my doctoral dissertation. Proust had died scarcely a decade earlier, and only half as many years had passed since the publication of his great work had been completed. The subject itself was too vast and too ill defined. Of Proust the man I knew nothing; my acquaintance with his work was slight. Indeed, the only portion of it that I had read was its second segment, *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*. What had determined my choice was not the vague prospect of working on Proust, but the notion, suggested to me by my thesis advisor, that such a task needed to be done and would be useful to others.

Once my advisor had agreed to direct my work, I wrote to a French book dealer ordering a complete set of Proust's works. A few months later, I received bound copies of the sixteen-volume edition of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the five volumes of *Correspondance générale*, along with one of *Pastiches et mélanges*, and another of *Chroniques*. As soon as the spring quarter had come to an end, I began to read *Du côté de chez Swann*, with my copy of the *Nouveau Petit Larousse* at my side. I spent the summer on the shore of Lake Michigan in my grandfather's garden reading Proust. Some passages I had to reread several times over, frequently consulting my dictionary. It was not until the end of the summer that I reached *Le Temps retrouvé*. It was a revelation.

As I think back to those *journées de lecture*, I realize that much of what I read must have confused me or escaped my comprehension. But as I read, I became conscious of the great beauty of Proust's prose, his poetic fantasy, and his humor; and I realized more and more that the writer I had chosen to investigate was a prodigious artist.

Another conviction that I gained during that first reading was that Proust's text was badly in need of revision. As I read, I took note of passages, almost all of them in the posthumous portion of the work, that repeated, word for word, what I had read in earlier parts. It occurred to me that I might make a modest contribution to Proust scholarship by doing a study of these inadvertent repetitions of material. When I told my thesis advisor what I had discovered, he suggested that I reread the entire novel to make sure that I had not missed any examples. After I had done so, and had written my article, I sent it off to *PMLA*. A few months later, to my surprise, I learned that the article had been accepted. When I reported the good news to my thesis advisor, he seemed not particularly pleased. His only comment was: "Ah! Parfait!" But he uttered those words in a tone that was so dry, so devoid of enthusiasm, even ironic, that it belied his words. It was evident that he found my news anything but "perfect." That tone implied a feeling that was at variance with his words. It was just the sort of discrepancy that Molière relied upon for comic effect, which he created by juxtaposing the words and the

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actions of his characters. But, in my case, the professor's attitude, far from comic, was ominous.

When I departed for Paris, however, he bade me farewell and suggested that I pay a call on his thesis advisor, Paul Hazard, a member of the Collège de France. One Saturday morning, M. Hazard received me with good grace in his handsome apartment. When I told him I was working on Proust's published correspondence, he said, with a chilling candor, that in his estimation it was futile to work on a text that had been edited in so unreliable a fashion. It did not occur to me that I had any alternative, since the originals of Proust's letters were, in all probability, inaccessible. The chaotic state in which the letters had been published—some eleven volumes of them were already in print—seemed to me to suggest the need for the sort of work I was undertaking.

As a government fellow *(boursier)*, I was instructed to make a call at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I was received there by M. Jean Marx, who gave me letters of introduction to three of Proust's friends: Robert de Billy, Robert Dreyfus, and Paul Morand. M. de Billy was most gracious, as was Robert Dreyfus. Through M. de Billy, I met Georges Cattaui, who had just published a book on Proust. It was Cattaui who introduced me to Mme Gérard Mante, the only child of Dr. Robert Proust, the writer's brother, and the only remaining member of his immediate family. Mme Mante, who had recently lost her father, was preparing to carry on with the edition he had begun of *Correspondance générale*. Learning that I was preparing a thesis on her uncle's correspondence, she invited me to assist in the preparation of the volume containing Proust's letters to Mme Emile Straus, Bizet's widow, whose conversation had served as Proust's model for that of the Duchesse de Guermantes. While we worked on the text of the letters, I undertook to date them. The volume was to be published toward the end of that same year (1936). Mme Mante included in her preface a word of acknowledgment for my datings of the letters.

My thesis advisor had spoken to me about a volume of Proust's letters that the University of Chicago library did not possess: Robert de Billy's *Lettres et conversations*. Luckily, I discovered three copies of the book at Gibert's bookstore on the boulevard Saint-Michel, and purchased them, sending two of them to my professor, one of which was intended for the university library. In writing to him, I told him, with naive candor, that I had met Proust's niece and had accepted her invitation to assist her with the publication of the letters to Mme Straus. During the spring, I succeeded in dating a number of the letters to Robert de Billy, so I sent the section of my thesis concerned with those letters to my advisor. He never wrote to acknowledge receiving the books I had sent him, nor did he answer my letters. In fact, I never again heard from him. As I learned later, he considered that I had "betrayed" him by using "his" method in helping Mme Mante with her edition of letters. When I took my case to the head of the department of Romance languages at the University of Chicago, Professor William Nitze, he was unsympathetic about my predicament. He said that my only option was to give up Proust and begin another dissertation under Professor E. Preston Dargan. That I refused to do. After some delay, I was able to recover the manuscript of my thesis. But leaving Chicago, where I had completed more than twenty hours of written preliminary examinations, meant a considerable sacrifice. When I told my story to Professor J. D. M. Ford, the distinguished head of the department at Harvard, his only remark was: "We don't think very much of Mr. V——." In later years, I earned a kind of distinction for having been the first of a series of Professor V——'s victims.

I had scarcely finished my Ph.D. when Hitler's legions invaded Austria. A year later, it was the Netherlands, then France, and the occupation. Pearl Harbor gave me a different sort of occupation—specifically, with the Navy. Further work on Proust was not possible. *Pendent opera interrupta*. While on active duty, I learned that a volume of Proust's letters had been published in Manchester, England, under the title *Lettres à une amie*. Unfortunately, the copy of the volume that I ordered never reached me. Rumor had it that a submarine had intervened. Some two years later, while on navy duty under General Eisenhower's command in London, I made another attempt to obtain a copy by writing to the editor. Instead of replying to my letter, he

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forwarded it to Proust's correspondent. That lady invited me to come to Manchester. Taking the train one Sunday, I went to spend the day in the company of Mrs. Riefstahl, née Marie Nordlinger, an artist whose mother was a first cousin of Reynaldo Hahn, Proust's best friend. I returned to London with an inscribed copy of *Lettres à une amie*, and a new friend. We kept in touch. After the war, Mrs. Riefstahl wrote to inform me of Reynaldo Hahn's death. Shortly thereafter, she received the originals of Proust's letters to Hahn, and wrote to ask me to come to Manchester to assist in preparing an edition of the letters for publication. With the help of the research board of my university, I spent the summer in Paris and in Manchester. In Mrs. Riefstahl's home I spent two and a half weeks transcribing Proust's letters. That is how I began work on the volume that Gallimard published a few years later under the title *Lettres à Reynaldo Hahn*.

Mrs. Riefstahl's own recollections of Proust were not without interest. She gave me to understand that she discerned in the character of Albertine certain reminiscences of herself. She told me how, at the time of Hahn's father's death in 1897, Proust had been present when she arrived, alone on a bicycle, at Saint-Cloud. In those days, no young lady of a good French family would have been permitted to go about unaccompanied for such an excursion. Since she was foreign, an English girl in Paris living far from her family, she had been free to go bicycle riding alone, as did Albertine. We know, too, that Marie Nordlinger helped Proust with his translations of Ruskin, and, on occasion, she would come to spend an evening at his bedside working with him on passages of *The Bible of Amiens* or *Sesame and Lilies*. Proust needed her help, because he had never studied English, and he wrote her some charming letters. Perhaps she fancied there was a deeper sentiment than actually existed in his regard for her. She appears to have entertained some romantic notions about their relationship. She did not marry until 1911.

Before going to Manchester that summer, I had spent a month in Paris, where Mme Mante asked me to prepare an edition of the letters Proust had exchanged with his mother. Most of them were undated. Mme Proust's letters were more difficult for me to decipher than Proust's. Mme Mante gave me a typescript of the letters, but it proved to be unreliable. One letter puzzled me, because part of it seemed to date from 1896, while another part of it appeared to belong to 1902. Finally, when I was able to examine the paper of the originals, I discovered that the fragments of two letters from different periods had been joined by mistake. The paper of the fragments was fairly similar but not precisely of the same format, so I had the confirmation that the letters did belong, as I had surmised, to two different periods.

It was during that same summer that I had an opportunity to meet Prince Antoine Bibesco. Proust had frequented Princesse Bibesco's salon when he was in his early twenties, and later, when he was searching for an editor for his novel, it was Emmanuel and Antoine Bibesco who put him in touch with his future editors. So I was interested in getting to know Bibesco. When I made his acquaintance, he was trying to constitute a dowry for his daughter, and counting on his collection of Proust's autograph letters to provide him with the required funds. He had some 220 of them, but there was at the time no great demand for Proust autographs, so he was asking only a modest price. My interest in acquiring them was slightly chilled when he let me know that he intended to publish a selection from them in a small volume. But he offered me a set of photocopies of the originals, along with proof sheets of his forthcoming volume. On comparing the prints with the proof, I could see that he was publishing less than half of the letters in his collection, and only fragments of many of them, often tampering with their text in a highly cavalier fashion. Consequently, I took advantage of his offer to recommend the purchase of his entire collection. (It was the first of an important series of acquisitions of Proust autographs that today belong to the Proust holdings in the University of Illinois library at Urbana.) Those holograph letters were to prove of great value to me in my research, in an unexpected manner, as we shall see.

That same summer of 1948 I first visited Illiers, the birthplace of Proust's father. Mme Mante invited me to make the journey with her and her son to attend the inauguration of the Society of Friends of Marcel Proust. The society's first president was Dr. Henri Mondor of the Académie Française.

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Another of Proust's friends whom I met during that summer was Fernand Gregh. His friendship with Proust went back to their school days. I had corresponded with M. Gregh and eagerly accepted his invitation to come to see him in Auteuil, at his charming country house where I was to return whenever I was in Paris. He received me most graciously, and assured me that somewhere in his attic, where he kept his accumulated papers, he thought there must be the letters he had received from Proust during and after the war. After his death, I met his daughter Mme Geneviève Gregh, with whom I discussed the mystery of the missing letters. She was intending to invite me to assist in a search for them when she met an early death. So the mystery remains unsolved.

Bibesco invited me that summer to dine at the Automobile Club, on the place de la Concorde, with the marquis de Lauris. Proust's letters to Georges de Lauris had just been published earlier that year. Although it was to take me some years to date those letters, they were to prove of exceptional importance for the information they provided about the period in which Proust was hesitating between writing either a novel or an essay attacking Sainte-Beuve. Georges de Lauris, whom Proust came to know in 1901, had his doctor's degree in law and was a writer. He introduced me to his charming wife, whom Proust had known before her first marriage. She was the daughter of a lady who had a preeminent position in the literary and social world, the baronne de Pierrebourg, who signed her books Claude Ferval. I also became acquainted with Mme Léon Yeatman, whom Proust had met before her marriage, and who was to help him with his Ruskin studies. Proust and Léon Yeatman had taken lessons together when they were students at the Sorbonne. It was during that same summer that I first met Céleste Albaret, who had been Proust's faithful housekeeper for the last years of his life, and her husband, Odilon, whom Proust had employed as a chauffeur for many years, and whom he had first met at Cabourg in 1907.

Just as the First World War had interrupted the publication of Proust's novel, the Second World War prevented me from publishing my Ph.D. thesis. After the war, I completed my study by taking into account the Proust letters that had come out subsequently, and I presented the results in a volume that the University of Illinois Press issued in 1949 under the title *La Correspondance de Marcel Proust: Chronologie et Commentaire Critique*. That volume prompted Mme Mante to ask me to undertake a new edition of Proust's correspondence. The contract for the new edition was signed by Mme Mante, the Président-Directeur-Général of the Librairie Plon, and myself, and dated July 25, 1952. The plan I submitted for the edition stipulated that it would include all available letters of the author and his correspondents; I was to establish the text of the letters, wherever possible, from the originals or photocopies, and to present them in chronological order, with full annotations, an introduction, a chronology, and an index for each volume. Instead of grouping the letters, as they had been in the earlier edition of *Correspondance générale*, according to the addressees, I wanted to present the letters in the sequence in which they had been written, in order to provide a detailed account of Proust's daily activities, as well as a kind of panorama of the period in which he had lived and worked.

The first volume of the series, covering the years 1880 to 1895, came out in 1970. It gives whatever documentation I could assemble for Proust's childhood, his adolescence, and young manhood. We see him briefly as a child, then as a lycée student, then during his military service (mostly through his mother's letters), finally as a student at the Sorbonne, writing his early essays. The second volume, including the years 1896 to 1901, shows him publishing his first book of collected essays and short stories and working on his first novel. The third volume contains only two years, 1902 and 1903, because the letters are more numerous for that and later periods. Volumes 4 through 9 cover a single year each and correspond to the number of the year. It is in volume 9, with the letters for the year 1909, that we see Proust finally embarking on his great work. We have a total of only 199 letters for the years 1910 and 1911, so they are included in a single volume (10), breaking the symmetry of the volume number with the year covered. Volume 12 contains the letters for 1913, the year in which *Du côté de chez Swann* was published.

It was, I believe, during my sabbatical leave

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in France in 1951–1952 that I met both a childhood friend of Proust's, Maurice Duplay, who was to become a novelist and historian, and a lycée friend of Proust's, Daniel Halévy, who became a writer and historian. M. de Lauris took me to meet Maurice Rostand. I also met Jacques de Lacretelle and Paul Morand. During the same year, I made contact with M. Lefebvre, a book dealer, who had in his possession a collection of Proust's papers, which he had acquired from Proust's sister-in-law, and which he allowed me to peruse. When I noticed among his papers a manuscript that I recognized as being a stray fragment of the early novel that had only recently been published under the title *Jean Santeuil*, I decided that we should acquire the collection. It now constitutes the most important of the Proust holdings in the University of Illinois library. In addition to two fragments from the manuscript of Proust's early novel, this collection includes, among other items, what is probably the largest extant collection of letters addressed to Proust. There are also sixty-seven of Proust's holograph letters, which he seems to have decided to keep instead of posting them to the addressees. One of them he did actually send to his ex-chauffeur Agostinelli, the only letter to him known to have been preserved. I was able to determine that it had been written the very day that the young man met his death in an airplane accident, so that the letter must have been "returned to sender." Proust later borrowed from it for letters quoted in *Albertine disparue* concerning Albertine's flight and sudden death. It is published together with the others of that collection in a volume entitled *Lettres retrouvées*.

It was during the summer of 1953 that Mme Mante entrusted to me the letters Jacques Rivière had written to Proust. After having them photocopied, I delivered them to Mme Isabelle Rivière, at La Chapelle-d'Angillon, the birthplace of Alain-Fournier, where, in exchange, I received those of Proust to Rivière. With the untiring assistance of Mme Rivière, I began to prepare for the publication of the letters. During my visit with her, Mme Rivière told me of the arduous task she and her husband had undertaken after Proust's death of extracting from the author's nearly illegible manuscript the text of *Albertine disparue* and *Le Temps retrouvé*. But Jacques Rivière had not lived long enough to see those volumes published.

During some three decades of research, I had naturally accumulated a vast store of information about Proust's activities and his publications. His letters had led me to discover a number of unknown publications. Consequently, I had constituted what was undoubtedly the most nearly complete listing in existence, and I was anxious to make it available to other Proust scholars. On the other hand, as we have seen, I had been able to discover two unpublished fragments of Proust's early novel, and I had access to nine others that had not yet been made known to the public, not to mention other texts that had not yet found their way into the published volumes of Proust's works. So I asked Mme Mante to authorize me to assemble a volume containing these disparate texts along with my bibliography. My young colleague Larkin B. Price assisted me in assembling the texts. The University of Illinois Press brought out the volume under the title *Textes retrouvés*. It contained my bibliography listing 381 items extending over a period of three quarters of a century. It included eleven previously unpublished fragments or chapters of Proust's early novel, *Salon de la comtesse Aimery de La Rochefoucauld*, three pastiches related to the *Affaire Lemoine* series, and a curious note that Proust had scribbled down concerning his affinities with Senancour, quoting from the *Réveries*. I also added a group of texts previously published but not included in editions of Proust's works, some of them not generally known. A few years afterward, I revised the volume (without Price's help), with a few additions, such as Proust's preface to Jacques-Emile Blanche's *Propos de peintre*, for publication in Gallimard's new series of *Cahiers Marcel Proust*.

My remark about the value of Proust's autograph letters for my research calls for an explanation. Since Proust seldom dated his letters—and since envelopes, if they were saved and if they had postmarks, may have been separated from the letters they contained—other means of dating them had to be found. The only way we could date most of his letters was from internal evidence—that is to say, from some allusion in the text of a letter that could be related to an event (the publication of a book, magazine, or newspaper, a

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marriage or a death, etc.) whose date we could ascertain. But there are numbers of Proust's letters that contain no such clue. In such cases, our only recourse was to examine the stationery of the original in the hope of being able to match the paper (in format, quality, watermark, mourning band) with another letter that I could date. Where such a letter was identical with another whose date could be ascertained, we had a presumption that both of them belonged to a fairly restricted period of time. In one instance, I had a letter addressed to an unidentified painter, paying him compliments for paintings Proust had just seen at an exposition. The paper of the original suggested that the letter might have been written about the spring of 1903. Hunting through the reviews of expositions of painters' works for the period, I found one by Maxime Dethomas that had been held in a small art gallery. After some considerable pains, I was lucky enough to obtain a photocopy of Dethomas's paintings that were displayed in Paris that April in 1903, and some of the listed titles coincided with those mentioned in Proust's letter. So I was able to identify the painter admired by Proust and to ascertain the approximate date of the letter.

That bit of research required some ten years to complete. Perhaps that example and the other questions discussed here may suggest—not an excuse but an explanation—why my studies of Proust and the editing of his correspondence have consumed so much time.

This story would in a sense be incomplete if it did not answer three remaining questions. The first of them has to do with library facilities. Without them, the work I undertook would have been impossible. My introduction to the sort of library resources sufficient in scope to enable me to carry on such investigations took place in the old Harper Library of the University of Chicago. Leaving there, I spent a year in Paris, dividing my time between the Sorbonne and the Bibliothèque Nationale. The latter institution is renowned as one of the greatest in the world, but one in which scholarly work may at times be difficult. It was my good fortune to have access to it under circumstances favored by my acquaintance with one of its young librarians, Mlle Hélène Frémont, through whom I obtained such rare privileges as admission to its labyrinthine stacks. Another significant advantage was the recent innovation of a catalogue room, installed at the order of its Administrateur Général, the famous Julien Cain. Many years later, he told me what a battle he had had to wage to convince his reluctant staff of its need; until then, the public had no access to the catalogues, and people were obliged to ask the staff for everything they wanted to read. Another innovation owing to Julien Cain was the Salle Ovale, where one could consult newspaper files and periodicals. I spent many an hour poring over the pages of *Le Figaro* and other newspapers of Proust's day. After I left Paris, I enjoyed the experience of exploring Harvard's Widener Library and making brief visits to the Carnegie Foundation Library in Pittsburgh and to the Library of Congress.

At the end of World War II, I accepted a position at the University of Illinois at Urbana, expecting to remain only one year. There I discovered that Illinois had the third-ranking university library in the United States. Even at that time, its holdings in French and English literature were extensive, and it had a sizeable collection of periodicals as well as files of a few French newspapers. The university library was able to provide ample funds for the purchase of books and periodicals, and even manuscript materials for faculty members actively engaged in research. Such a library, so endowed and with its highly competent staff, provided an ideal place to carry on my work. With support from the University Research Board and outside agencies, and a generous subsidy from the National Endowment for the Humanities, which enabled me to import a research associate from the École Normale Supérieure de Jeunes Filles, it has, in recent years, been possible for me to accelerate the rhythm of my work in hope of bringing my edition to completion.

Soon after beginning work on Proust, I had become aware of the lack of any seriously documented biography of that author. That was hardly surprising in view of the nebulous state of Proust chronology and the sparsity of source material. So I resolved to assemble the elements of a critical biography as an ultimate objective of my work on the correspondence. In the course of my research, I managed to clarify certain important periods in Proust's career, notably in tracing the composition of

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his early novel and in sorting out the puzzle of how a critical essay on Sainte-Beuve had turned into a novel. I also uncovered an unknown short story that Proust had written when in his early twenties, "*L'Indifférent*," containing elements he would later incorporate in his novel.

But an unexpected event gave me pause, making me fear for the fate of my biography. That event was the publication, in 1959, of George Painter's *Proust: The Early Years*. The book was an immediate success and soon became a classic. To me, however, it meant that all the material I had been accumulating toward a biography during so many years of study was suddenly presented to the reading public in a book that not only told the story I had wanted to tell but was written with a skill and an imagination matching that found in Balzac's novels. Although the work did not always correspond to my findings concerning the sequence of events in Proust's career, and Painter's view of the author's character did not coincide with mine, I could see little hope of ever publishing my version of Proust's life. Nevertheless, I continued to accumulate my *fiches*, making my annual visits to France in search of material. My purpose was to enrich my edition of the correspondence. But my quest also led me to uncover a considerable body of knowledge about Proust that had not been known before. When I counted up the number of previously unpublished letters in one of my volumes of correspondence, in order to let my publisher know the proportion of new ones it contained, it surprised me to find that the total represented something between one-third and one-half of the letters in that volume. The same was true for the other volumes in the series. That meant that during the years elapsed since Painter's biography had come out, I had published a considerable body of information that had been unavailable to him for his biography. It also meant that I no longer had to restrict myself to the same story that he had told in recounting the life of Proust.

Meanwhile, in writing the introduction to each volume of my edition of the correspondence, I had given the account provided by the letters in that volume for Proust's activities in the period covered. So that, in actual fact, I had already written a large segment of my biography. With the publication of volume 12, which presents the letters for the year 1913, there remain, yet to be taken into account, Proust's early years and the last nine years of his life. It would appear, consequently, that my long-held dream of writing a life of Proust may well be within the range of possibility.

One last question. On occasion, people have asked me how I could have spent a lifetime "working on a single man." I take exception to that sort of loaded question because, in the first place, my work has never been confined to Proust as a man. He had dated so few of his letters that I had to begin work by acquainting myself with all of his writings as well as his life. And the bibliography of his writings that I was able to constitute shows that he published far more than is generally assumed of one whom many people consider to have been a dilettante. But more important than that, one cannot work "on" Proust without embracing his entire universe, which was extraordinarily wide in scope. In order to comprehend the mind that had written the works, it was necessary to steep myself in the period in which he lived. And since, from his early years, he was fascinated with history, I had to follow him there, too. But since—contrary to popular notions about him—Proust's interests were so wide, I had to delve into music, painting, architecture, sculpture, botany, and other realms. His principal concern, of course, was literature. And with his phenomenal memory, his knowledge encompassed not only the centuries of French literature, prose as well as poetry, but the writings of English and American novelists and philosophers, novelists of Russia and some other European countries, mostly in translation. One cannot hope to comprehend Proust's world without familiarity with these various worlds, too.

Consequently, the question about working on a single man is somewhat like asking how one could listen "only" to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. I could be happy doing so, but can we not listen to Bach and still enjoy other composers as well? With Proust, the work that needed to be done was endless, so it was indispensable to concentrate on him. But the answer to the question is that, when the subject of one's inquiry is Proust, a lifetime would scarcely suffice to permit exploration in depth of the innumerable facets of his uni-

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verse. Nothing could be more captivating than to explore the mind of such a genius—an intellect of such capacity, an artist of such prodigious sweep and power, whose ability to move us, to make us feel the beauties of nature, and the warmth of human affection was so great—or to observe how he reacted when confronted with current events, how he judged his contemporaries, how his own ideas evolved with the passage of time, or simply to observe what inspired him, how he created his characters and episodes. In editing the correspondence of such a man, one should, of course, bear in mind that so modest an endeavor cannot constitute one's sole aim, but rather it should be a means of attaining a deeper comprehension of the work of the creative artist. In Proust's case, his correspondence represents a special kind of work, since he never intended its publication. For the reader, it offers a means of gaining a better understanding of his mind, his character, and, consequently, his great work. And to the editor, delving into his writings has meant an unending enchantment, an enrichment, and a widening of horizons.

The End of the Journey

MARY KENNEDY

Willows droop upon unmoving water
A melancholy mourning picture.
They grow along a drive that curves
To reach the house across the lake.
A tall and lovely pale green house
Reflected in darkening green water,
Starred with glimmering lilies.
I gaze and silence deepens.
No early yellow leaf descends,
No fish stirs,
No bird sings in the hidden garden,
No gentle face glances from the window.
An unbreathing presence seems
to inform the air,
Giving dignity to lives once lived here—
It broods over the untroubled waters.
Yet I fear to approach,
Fear to follow the path.
Fear to knock upon the dimly seen door.

MARY KENNEDY is the author of *New Green Over Old Green* and other books of poems, as well as children's books. Many of her plays have been produced here and abroad.

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Strictly Arbitrary

What Do Arbitrators Do?

PETER SEITZ

arbitration, *n.* The process by which the parties to a dispute submit their differences to the judgment of an impartial person or group appointed by mutual consent or statutory provision.

—*The American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition*

For more than thirty years I have been a full-time arbitrator of management-union disputes. I have often been asked, "What's your line?" When I respond that I am an arbitrator, I find frequently that it conveys little or nothing to the inquirer. I have been distressed by the general lack of understanding about what arbitration is and what arbitrators do. The purpose of my article is to convey, in a kind of *Guide to the Perplexed,* some of the basic features of the American system of labor arbitration.

Arbitration is an ancient process for resolving conflict; it is probably older than our system of courts. The earliest arbitration known to me is that which furnished the basis for attributing transcendent wisdom to King Solomon. To my knowledge, it is the *only* episode on which his reputation for wisdom is grounded. It will be recalled (as recounted in I Kings 3:16–28) that two harlots competed before the king for sole custody of an infant. Each claimed to be the mother. King Solomon suggested—some would say out of desperation, others would say with cunning—that the child be divided in two with a sword and the halves distributed equally to the litigants (a classic if brutal illustration of the art of compromise). One of the harlots was content that this be done. The other, pleading that the child's life was more important than her custody of one-half of its person, told Solomon that he should spare the child's life and give custody to her adversary. Impressed by this exhibition of motherly love, Solomon gave custody of the whole child to the harlot who would spare its life. "And all Israel . . . saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do judgment." King Solomon has been basking in universal commendation for wisdom ever since.

My arbitration experience leads me to take a revisionist position toward the episode. It seems to me that the harlot who prevailed in the case shrewdly took the measure of Solomon and decided that he was what would now be called a "bleeding heart"—that is, a "push-over" for a clever but insincere ploy. Her plea was not as disinterested as Solomon assumed but rather was a deceptive stratagem to win the case.

If my analysis is correct, Solomon's reputation for wisdom is undeserved. Moreover, he would not be regarded today as qualified to become a member of the National Academy of Arbitrators. It may well be that, occasionally, some arbitrators are similarly gulled by advocates; however, such incompetence gets bruited about quickly in industrial relations circles, and any arbitrator who performed his services in so incompetent a manner would not long be an arbitrator.

For centuries common-law court judges

✪ PETER SEITZ, a lawyer by training, was the sole arbitrator in the famous Major League baseball reserve system case. Mr. Seitz died shortly after completing this essay.

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were hostile to the process of arbitration because it offered an alternative to court litigation. Public judges, who in the early days of English law were compensated for their services by the litigants, could not reasonably be expected to encourage what they regarded as a competing quasi-judicial process. Those days are now long past. Today the American law courts and the federal and state statutes not only encourage but often defer to arbitration decisions, particularly those that resolve disputes between employers and unions concerning the interpretation and application of collective bargaining agreements. Resort to arbitration in employer-union disputes is an established public policy, nationally and in most states. Arbitration has replaced strikes and lockouts as the predominant feature of our national labor policy.

At the outset I should explain that there are two systems of arbitration. One is loosely called *commercial arbitration*; the other is commonly referred to as *labor arbitration*. (Arbitration is also used to a limited extent in resolving international disputes and some other controversies.) Commercial arbitration deals with disputes that arise in a wide variety of transitory business transactions. Labor arbitration is concerned with disputes between labor unions and employers in their more or less permanent relationships.

There are two types of labor arbitration. One is called *interest arbitration* because it establishes for each party the interests that will be expressed in the collective bargaining contract. In interest arbitration the arbitrator determines, for inclusion in the agreement, those provisions on which the parties were unable to agree in their negotiating sessions. The other type of labor arbitration, called *rights* or *grievance arbitration*, is much more frequently resorted to and concerns itself with rights and duties of the parties. Grievance arbitration, in other words, concerns the *interpretation* and *application* of the provisions in existing collective bargaining agreements that govern the continuing relationship of employers and unions. By far the greatest number of arbitrations involve grievances alleging that contract rights have been violated.

Rights and grievance arbitration are used in both the private and public (or governmental) sectors. With a few exceptions, such arbitration is only used when there is a bargaining relationship between an employer and a union. Probably the most outstanding feature of grievance arbitration is its wholly consensual and voluntary character.

A bit of history may be helpful. In the 1930s and 1940s, American industry was plagued with innumerable strikes and work stoppages occurring during the lives of collective bargaining agreements, causing great loss to production and the earnings of employees. Frequently—and as still occurs in England, France, Italy, and other industrial nations—when conflict arose about the proper interpretation and application of the terms governing the relationship, workers had no practicable or effective means of resolution available except to walk off the job or resort to other means of self-help, regardless of whether the action was authorized by their unions. To meet this problem, collective bargaining contracts began to include provisions that prohibited employee strikes and management lockouts. This prohibition could not have been imposed fairly without also affording employees and their unions a satisfactory forum for the resolution of their grievances. If disputes about the many newly created rights and duties established by collective bargaining agreements were to have been resolved by litigation in the public courts, the court calendars would have become intolerably congested, the cases would have been subject to interminable delays, and the cost of litigation would have been more than employees and their unions could bear. In addition, many people believed that judges in public courts—who are called upon to decide all manner of disputes—might not possess the particular experience and special expertise demanded for the resolution of industrial conflicts. It was thought that a system of private jurisprudence—that is, arbitration—would better serve the requirements of the parties than conventional litigation in the courts. Arbitration promised not only to reduce delays and costs but to deliver better-informed judgments than the public courts could furnish.

As a result, a grievance-arbitration system was developed as a part of the national labor policy to furnish just such a forum to resolve disputes. Model contract provisions providing for the new arbitration system were drafted and made available to parties in conflict. The model provisions now appear in tens of thou-

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sands of collective bargaining agreements and possess whatever modifications the particular circumstances require. The grievance-arbitration system calls for formal meetings by management and union officials, on an ascending hierarchical scale of steps, to examine the facts and consider the merits of the grievances filed. The objective of these grievance sessions is to resolve controversies, if at all possible, by the concerned parties themselves, without the intervention of an arbitrator. If these grievance sessions fail to produce an acceptable resolution, the unsatisfied party can appeal through the grievance procedure to arbitration, which is conducted by a single arbitrator or by a board of arbitrators, whichever the parties choose.

Action in formal grievance sessions is usually required within prescribed time limits to avoid delays. Ideally, these steps in the grievance procedure furnish each of the parties an opportunity to investigate the disputed facts and become aware of the strengths and weaknesses of its case. Where such investigation and mutual consideration are properly conducted, the parties become aware of each other's positions so that, if the controversy proceeds to arbitration, the hearing will be materially expedited. Unfortunately, this does not always occur. Many employers and unions are inclined to treat the grievance sessions as though they were games of five-card stud poker, and thus withhold critical facts and arguments until the close of arbitration hearings. On the other hand, some employers and unions have learned to use the sessions to their great mutual advantage.

Let me stress again the wholly voluntary character of this grievance-arbitration system. It exists only when the parties agree to its existence. The parties themselves, as an alternative to resorting to economic force, create and administer the system. Instead of litigating before a judge in a public court, the parties themselves mutually designate the arbitrator of their choice and agree to be bound by his decision, one made in their own private quasi-judicial tribunal. Harry Schulman, one of the leading expositors of the grievance-arbitration plan, described the system as "private industrial self-government." Arbitrators, to be sure, do not have the power to enforce their decisions, as do judges in the public courts; but the parties have expressly contracted in advance to be bound by what the arbitrator might decide, and the public courts are available to enforce arbitration awards.

Arbitration sidesteps the legalistic technicalities of the public court system. A United States district court judge, for example, must take care that his hearing and decision conform to the law in his jurisdiction. If they do not, he risks reversal by appellate courts on review. There is no positive body of law, however, to which an arbitrator must conform. He is not chosen to identify and apply an existing set of rules of law, and his decisions are not subject to general review by the courts. He is selected, rather, because of his presumed familiarity with institutional practices in the management-union relationship and with the provisions of collective bargaining agreements and because of the confidence the parties repose in his judgment and impartiality.

A further advantage of arbitration is that there exists no code of practice and procedure such as that which governs court litigation. The arbitrator is bound to the arbitration practices developed by the parties and the requirements of due process and fair hearing. Beyond those, he conducts the hearing in a manner that will ensure that its major objective will be achieved—namely, that he will leave the hearing informed of all the facts and arguments in order to render a decision that will be perceived as just and knowledgeable. To achieve this end, he need not apply the technical rules of evidence adhered to in courts of law; he can choose any traditional court practices, procedures, or customs that, in his judgment, serve his needs in making a just decision. He can tailor the procedures to the special circumstances of the case.

An arbitrator's decision, it ought to be observed, is not absolutely unimpeachable, although it seldom happens that awards are vacated by the courts. An arbitrator whose decision exceeds the scope of the issues in the dispute confided to him, who fails in advance to disclose a disqualifying interest in the dispute, or who is simply corrupt risks court action nullifying his award.

This description—stated perhaps with excessive brevity that prevents taking into account many important aspects of the process—limns the institutional structure of the American grievance-arbitration system. But who ex-

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actly does the arbitrating? How are arbitrators chosen? What are the significant characteristics of the calling?

In the late 1930s and the 1940s, when thousands of new collective bargaining agreements with grievance-arbitration clauses were being negotiated, it became necessary to develop a cadre of acceptable arbitrators who would be available on call to serve the disputing parties. Manifestly, it was critically important that arbitrators be wholly impartial and not have any disqualifying interest in the disputes. It was of equal importance that each of the disputing parties should be able to repose its full confidence in the arbitrator as one who was free of predisposition, bias, or institutional relationships that might interfere with the rendering of a fair and proper award.

In the early years of grievance arbitration, relatively few persons were accepted as impartial. Unions were highly suspicious of lawyers who had represented managements, even in litigation alien to industrial relations problems. In 1947 when I served as the assistant to the director of the Federal Mediator Service, a vice-president of labor relations for a prestigious company told me, "I should have to be out of my mind to risk putting the investments of our stockholders in the hands of some long-haired professor serving as an arbitrator." Notwithstanding such fears, a small group of acceptable arbitrators was found for employers and unions; and, as time went on, with the exercise of discriminating care, the number of acceptable arbitrators grew. Today more than six hundred persons in the United States are members of the National Academy of Arbitrators, and about half are full-time professional arbitrators. Arbitrators who are not members of the professional association probably number more than a thousand.

Arbitrators come from a variety of walks of life. Some have had experience in federal and state government work in which they were required to maintain an impartial stance; some were (or are) academics; some are clergy; and some are retired management or union officers who have painstakingly earned reputations as acceptable arbitrators.

People who arbitrate regard themselves as following a profession, one that differs in important respects from other well-recognized professions. Arbitrators do not have to follow a prescribed curriculum of study, or pass a battery of qualifying tests, or obtain a government license to practice, as do doctors, lawyers, dentists, accountants, and teachers in primary and secondary schools. Many arbitrators are members of the bar, but many others have no legal background whatsoever. The basic standard for recognition as an arbitrator is general acceptability and designation by the parties. That standard can be more exacting than may be imagined. Every time an arbitrator renders a decision, somebody wins and somebody loses. An arbitrator will not long remain in the calling if the losers are not satisfied that the decision was fair and that the judgment, even if not agreed with and approved, was rational and in accordance with the evidence. It is doubtful that government regulation or licensing produces a higher degree of professionalism than the rigorous selection system employed for choosing arbitrators.

Most, but not all, of the best arbitrators are members of the National Academy of Arbitrators. Applicants for membership must be of recognized good character and be able to demonstrate a required degree of acceptability, not to mention substantial arbitration experience. They may not be accepted as members if they currently represent either managements or unions. The Academy's Code of Professional Responsibility furnishes a guide for arbitrators in their relationships with the parties who retain them. For failure to observe the code, a member may be warned, disciplined, or expelled from membership.

When the parties or their advocates have had previous experience with an arbitrator, they may agree to designate him directly. When they cannot agree on the arbitrator, they may seek the assistance of the American Arbitration Association, the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, or other agencies that will submit lists of competent arbitrators from which to make a selection. If the parties still cannot agree, the administering agency will appoint an arbitrator.

At this point it seems pertinent to address the popular misconception that arbitrators *compromise* disputes. This, as a Soviet diplomat would say, is extreme provocation. The word *compromise* touches a highly sensitive arbitral nerve. It suggests that the arbitrator,

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like Solomon, has a proclivity to decide complicated issues by the simple procedure of dividing by two. Were the arbitrator's life that uncomplicated! To those who harbor such a misconception I point out, with a great effort of patience, belied by my beating pulse and a certain edgy quality in my voice, that I do not compromise; I decide. This requires some explanation. *Compromise* means an arrangement in which a dispute is resolved by each of the disputants conceding to the other interests for which it had contended. By the time a dispute reaches the arbitration table, the parties should have had abundant opportunities (in the course of grievance "step meetings" and otherwise) to explore the possibilities of settling the dispute on mutually acceptable terms. When at long last they come to arbitration, the arbitrator asks the parties to agree on the wording of the specific issue that they are submitting to him for an arbitral award.

For example, they might ask the arbitrator to decide such an issue as whether, in denying a vacation to employee X in 1982, the employer had violated article VIII of the collective bargaining agreement, and if so, what remedy is appropriate. An issue stated in such a manner confers no plenipotentiary powers on the arbitrator. If he should picture himself as Zeus on Mount Olympus dispensing his own brand of godlike justice, he is badly in need of therapy. The issue—in point of fact a specific question about a particular violation of the parties' agreement—calls only for a yes or no answer. If no contract violation occurred, that is an end to the matter. If a violation has in fact occurred, the arbitrator exercises his best judgment in deciding what relief is appropriate under the terms of the agreement. The case may, in the arbitrator's judgment, call for relief or remedial action that is different from that which the moving party had desired; however, this is not "compromising" but fashioning a remedy appropriate to the circumstances. An arbitrator who "compromises" in his decision on an issue is derelict, and his decision runs the risk of being vacated in a court test.

In the course of an arbitration hearing, should the parties want to settle their differences and have the grievance withdrawn, there is nothing to prevent it. Those who had created the process can, by agreement, bring it to a halt. An adjustment of differences arranged by the parties themselves is preferable to the decision of an adjudicator. Should both of the parties, in mid-hearing, expressly seek my aid in the mediation of their dispute, I should serve gladly; but I consider myself as having been retained only to *decide* the differences that the parties, by their own efforts, had been unable to resolve. Anything beyond that mission is an abuse of duty and power.

As mentioned earlier, the limitations on an arbitrator are either self-imposed or required by law or by the Code of Professional Responsibility. For example, arbitrators are expected to comply with the historic requirements of fair hearing and procedural due process of law. Capricious, arbitrary, or whimsical conduct by an arbitrator in conducting a hearing or deciding a case can result in the award being vacated by the courts. In preparing his decision, the arbitrator is restricted to answering the question submitted and to assessing the facts presented at the hearing. He has no franchise to go outside the record made before him. Another requirement of the professional code is that an arbitrator make a full disclosure of any interest, association, or relationship that, in the reasonable judgment of either party, might impugn his impartiality and fairness. He should be compensated for his services and expenses according to the terms of the agreement of the parties; or, if the subject is not mentioned therein, he should bill each of the parties for one-half of the total. As important as any of the above-mentioned restrictions is the prohibition against the arbitrator dispensing his own personal brand of industrial justice. His decision must have fidelity to the terms of the agreement and to its essence as he perceives it. He may be a private judge, but one with limited powers.

Some twenty-five years ago I conducted a seminar under the auspices of the American Management Association for management attorneys. The purpose of the seminar was to discuss the best techniques for the presentation of cases in arbitration. At the close of the sessions I remarked that, when I stand before the angels at the pearly gates, I should be confident of gaining entry because as an arbitrator I had been right in fully 60 percent of my arbitral decisions. An attorney who had appeared before me from time to time then arose and admonished me, saying, "Seitz, we don't hire you to be right 60 percent of the

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time. You are supposed to be right 100 percent of the time!" I responded that the quality of my decisions is governed largely by the merits of advocates' presentations. If the quality of presentations before me improved even 5 percent, I am confident that I could improve the quality of my decisions about 30 percent. Experience and impartiality alone do not guarantee that the arbitrator will reach the right conclusion. Arbitrators err from time to time, as judges do, but they hope to be right more than they are wrong.

Just as water does not naturally rise above its source, an arbitral decision in most instances cannot be expected to surpass the quality of the presentations of the advocates. When the level of advocacy is low, it is unreasonable to expect excellence in the decision. Courts and arbitration tribunals are not machines for grinding out absolute truth and justice. When there is sharp disagreement between two parties, the most that should be expected of the arbitrators is that, in using fair procedures and sound judgment, they come as close to truth and justice as human institutions can manage.

Arbitrators may be retained for a specific number of years, or for the length of the parties' collective bargaining contract, in which case they would decide all grievance disputes that might arise thereunder. These mediators are variously called umpires, referees, or permanent arbitrators. Others who are selected only for the resolution of a particular dispute might be called ad hoc arbitrators. Like the drone bee that has brief sexual connection with the queen bee and then conveniently expires, these ad hoc arbitrators may serve unsatisfactorily on a case or two and then disappear in the mists of obscurity, no longer heard from as arbitrators. Others, despite the fact that in each case one of the parties has to be a loser, continue to be retained as arbitrators for decades.

Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a permanent arbitrator. The title is no more than an expression of wish fulfillment and is a contradiction in terms. Arbitrators are as vulnerable to coups, rudely dispossessing them of their office, as leaders of the Third World nations. When an arbitration case is lost, the unhappy management or union advocate is held accountable by his constituents and clients, and the arbitrator makes a convenient scapegoat. Like the Athenians who made it a habit to exile unsuccessful military leaders, the losing party frequently exiles the hapless arbitrator from its dispute-resolving system; but, again like the Athenians, with the passage of time and unsatisfactory experience with other arbitrators, the exiled arbitrator's imagined sins are on occasion either forgiven or forgotten, and he is recalled for further services.

The instability of the relationship of the arbitrator and his clients may be illustrated by recounting a personal experience. For some six or seven years I was the sole arbitrator selected by the Major Leagues of Baseball and the Players Association for the arbitration of grievances. I sat as the impartial chairman of an arbitration board that consisted of one member designated by the Major League clubs and one by the Players Association. Following the refusal of the Supreme Court (in the *Flood* case) to overrule a previous decision rendered in the 1920s, which had stated that baseball was not subject to the antitrust laws in connection with the reserve system then in effect, a grievance was filed by the Players Association in behalf of a player, Andy Messersmith, attacking that reserve system. Under that system (based upon contract provisions and Major League rules) a player would sign a standard contract form for one year of service. A provision in the contract declared that at the end of the year the baseball club, at its sole option, could extend the period of service for yet another year simply by proffering a similar contract with the same self-renewing clause. If the player refused to sign the proffered contract in the second year (or in any subsequent year, as long as he was on the club's roster), he could not offer his services to any other club because the Major League rules forbade all other clubs from tampering with the player.

Messersmith, who was a highly talented pitcher, had served out his initial year and his option year. He filed a grievance because he had been prevented from negotiating with other clubs. If he did not prevail in the arbitration, his club would have had exclusive use of his services for the rest of his baseball years. In other words, he would not have an opportunity to peddle his skills to other clubs that might compensate him for his services at a higher rate of pay.

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In the course of extended hearings it became evident that there were many considerations weighing heavily in favor of some kind of reserve system. The large financial investment in club franchises, the wide diversity in the financial resources of franchise holders, the fan interest in individual players as members of a local team, and the need for relative parity among clubs, as well as other considerations, strongly argued for a reasonable reserve system. The players' union recognized the need for a reserve system, but it complained that the one grieved was too restrictive and inconsistent with a fundamental principle of a democratic society—namely, the freedom to perform services for the employer of one's choice.

During the executive sessions of the arbitration board, I became aware that the parties were shortly to negotiate a new collective bargaining contract. The record of the case disclosed that the parties had never had an adequate opportunity in their previous negotiations to bargain fully as to the terms of an appropriate reserve system. There was no question in my mind that the parties were much more competent than I to devise a less restrictive and more satisfactory system by themselves—and, in any event, the question of what such a system might be had not been submitted to me as an issue for my decision. Accordingly, I offered to withhold a decision until the parties held their negotiation sessions, during which they could reach an agreement about the terms of an acceptable reserve system. The Major Leagues were not persuaded by my recommendation. I was told to proceed with the case to its conclusion.

After extensive discussion at executive sessions of the arbitration board, I prepared a draft of a proposed decision in which Messersmith, the grievant, was *not* bound to the specific club with which he had contracted for the rest of his athletic life. The proposed decision further stated that he was a "free agent" at liberty to bargain with any other clubs for his services. I have to assume that the Major Leagues were well aware of the contents of the proposed decision several days before a final copy of the document was readied for signature. (The irrepressibly curious will find the decision in *Professional Baseball Clubs*, 66 LA [Labor Arbitration Reports]: 101. [The National Bureau of Affairs, Washington, D.C.; 1976].) Immediately after I signed the document, the board member designated by the Major Leagues, who was vigorously dissenting from the majority decision, handed me a pink slip; the Major Leagues no longer desired my services as its arbitrator. And they have not requested my services since then.

When news of the decision came out, sports broadcasters and reporters announced that the sky was falling. There were notable exceptions to this hysteria, among them the late Red Smith, a Pulitzer Prize winner. The indignation of the club owners struck a Wagnerian chord of even deeper resonance. It sounded like the last five minutes of *Götterdämmerung*, or the Twilight of Baseball. I was accused of having destroyed the national pastime. To the players, of course, I was the Great Emancipator who saved them from a life of indentured servitude. These conflicting characterizations were grossly exaggerated. Baseball players were not slaves, although, to be sure, the freedom to contract for their personal services had been wrongfully denied them. As for the national pastime, the prophecies of chaos and destruction were unfulfilled by experience. Since the decision, the number of hot dogs, bottles of beer, soft drinks, and tickets sold in baseball stadiums has escalated to unprecedented heights, and the competition among baseball teams has never been keener.

The decision in the Messersmith case may or may not deserve credit for this happy state of affairs. But, when the dust finally settled, the Major Leagues and the Players Association did what should have been done before the decision was signed: they negotiated a mutually agreeable reserve system for baseball. If there is a moral in this, it is not for me to declare. I am an arbitrator. My sole function is to *decide* the issues presented by the parties.

Labor arbitration is one of the most successful institutions generated by industrial society. It brings justice to those in conflict. If the forum of grievance arbitration were not available, the national policy of collective bargaining could not have been made to work. Arbitration substitutes a system of rational and peaceful resolution of conflict for counterproductive measures of self-help or the resort to

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economic force. It replaces the law of claw and fang by a system of industrial jurisprudence. But, like other institutions in our society, it has its limitations and weaknesses.

Its greatest limitation is that the arbitral forum is available only to employees who are members of labor unions having collective bargaining agreements with their employers. Very few employees not in unions enter into individual contracts with their employers, and few of those contracts have stipulations that disputes may be arbitrated. Most unorganized employees in the nation are employed at the will or whim of their employer and are not protected by collective bargaining clauses that stipulate they can only be discharged for "just cause," which, ultimately, is determined by an arbitrator.

Clearly, if non-union employees are to be justly treated, they should have a speedy, economical forum for the resolution of grievances, and certainly one with more highly specialized experience than that provided by the courts. There are many difficulties to be overcome in the development of such tribunals, but, in time, I am confident that the nation will find a way to achieve that objective. The need is sufficiently strong to demand that the effort to do so be made.

Arbitration is not a universal prescription for industrial peace, as many thunderers in the editorial pages and in broadcasting would have us believe. Whenever the public interest is threatened, the media bellow for arbitration. Arbitration is highly useful, particularly in industry; but if it is overused or misused, arbitration will dilute the benefits of the national collective bargaining policy.

I have emphasized that arbitrators do not compromise. This is certainly true of grievance arbitration, but the very purpose and design of interest arbitration is to carry on, at the level of the interest arbitration board, those failed negotiations that led the parties to an impasse. In such an arbitration (typically quasi-legislative rather than quasi-judicial in nature), a majority vote of the arbitration board is required. The impartial arbitrator, whose signature to the award is indispensable for a majority decision, has the clout to force concessions from his colleagues that in the pre-arbitration contract negotiations the parties themselves were unwilling or unable to make. If he cannot obtain unanimity, he is in a position to persuade them to narrow their differences in the controversy and then obtain concurrence from one or another of his colleagues to a decision that he perceives as fair. In this process, compromise, a procedure alien to the quasi-judicial process of grievance arbitration, is not only useful but, manifestly, essential.

Interest arbitration is not favored by most employers and unions. It chills collective bargaining and substitutes a neutral's decision for one that should be made by the parties that must administer and abide by it. Resort to interest arbitration in the public sector usually occurs in situations in which work stoppages may critically affect a broad public interest. Whether interest arbitration should or should not be invoked (notwithstanding the damage it might wreak upon collective bargaining) is a most difficult decision to make. An interest award may be rendered, and a court may require compliance with its provisions. No assurances exist, however, that employees will work for the wages and under the conditions that the interest arbitrators have imposed. In a highly critical labor dispute, if they should refuse to do so, the foundations of a democratic society would be tested and strained. This has always been successfully avoided in the past, but the hazards persist.

"Even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea," according to Swinburne. A squint at the mortality tables informs me that the same can be said of a long career in arbitration. I have found immense satisfaction in the struggle to ascertain what is true or false and in the effort to determine what is fair and just. Arbitration has afforded me that experience because it substitutes a system of civil adjudication and social order for economic force and warfare. I am grateful to have been a part of such a civilized system.

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Deeper into Life

Robert Frost's Last Years

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Robert Frost received his fourth Pulitzer for *A Witness Tree* in May 1943; he died in Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, in January 1963, at age eighty-eight. The final two decades of his life were those of a man whose productions as a poet, for the first time in his career, took a position secondary to his life as a public figure, a pundit, an institution, a cultural emissary. He had become the goodest greyest poet since Walt Whitman. *Steeple Bush* was published in 1947, and Randall Jarrell told the truth about it in the *New York Times Book Review* when he noted that "most of the poems merely remind you, by their persistence in the mannerisms of what was genius, that they are the productions of someone who once, and somewhere else, was a great poet"—although Jarrell rightly excepted "Directive" from his stricture. Frost did not see this review of *Steeple Bush* (his secretary, Kathleen Morrison, assured him that it was "all right"), but he did see one in *Time* that said the book "did nothing to enlarge his greatness." He promptly went into a tailspin, suffering pains in his wrists and chest. The review almost literally went to his heart; he was treated by a doctor who found no evidence of an attack, but who diagnosed the strain Frost was under and elicited from him the reasons for it.

It is fair to say that from that point on, his writing, or at least his publishing of poetry, became occasional rather than habitual. After the appearance of the *Complete Poems* in 1949, he managed to produce about one poem a year, and did so under the pressure of sending out his annual Christmas card, consisting of a new poem. But as the poems dried up, his reputation expanded. Let the poet be sent to Brazil and to Israel. Let him receive degrees from two ancient English universities. Make him poetry consultant at the Library of Congress. Let him read a poem at the inauguration of a president. Send him to the Soviet Union and let him talk with Premier Khrushchev. Make various films about him in which he pauses by a stone wall, or shoulders an ax, or putters around the stove in the kitchen of his Vermont cabin. Make sure that everyone knows America possesses, in Jarrell's phrase (from his essay "The Other Frost"), "The Only Genuine Robert Frost in Captivity."

It is difficult not to regard Frost's later years—in which the poems written were relatively few and relatively minor—with mixed feelings. The series of triumphs of the public figure may be celebrated for the honor they brought him; alternatively this increasing publicization may be regretted or even deplored. Surely there was something less than heartening in the spectacle of an old man being listened to too often, by too many people, most of whom cared little about poetry and cared about his only because they thought it wholesome country-American. At certain moments Frost spoke with candor and wry self-knowledge about what had happened to him, and on one such occasion, in an interview with Randall Jarrell at the Library of Congress in 1959, he mused on the difference between private and public, on what might be lost in moving from one realm to the other. "I'm a bad man to have around at a wedding,"

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he said. "What begins in felicity and privacy, ends in publicity—and maybe really ends there. A wedding is the end of it." And he continued, thoughtfully: "What begins in felicity and a career like mine, you know, could end. . . . Someone might say mockingly, what began in felicity and all the privacy and secrecy and furtiveness of your poetry is ending in a burst of publicity." Yet the fact was that over the course of his life he had devoted intense energy toward making sure that his work did not lack publicity, and of the most favorable kind.

Since on occasion he was able to view what had happened to him with perspective, even with a touch of irony (as in the play on the phrase "ends in publicity"), we should likewise be of two minds about his romance with fame and publicity. The weakness of the late poems is partly a matter of Frost's disregard for his own principles. After the eloquence with which, in the preface to Edwin Arlington Robinson's last book, he had insisted that poetry be left free to "go her way in tears," that her subject was "griefs, not grievances," *Steeple Bush*, a decade or so after the preface, was full of grievances against such phenomena as "the guild of social planners" ("The Planners"), or the revolutionary figure (in "A Case for Jefferson") who wants America "made over new" ("He's Freudian Viennese by night. / By day he's Marxian Muscovite"), or against other prophets of disaster (one poem is titled "The Prophet of Disaster"). Frost felt compelled to respond to earthshaking world events like the dropping of the atomic bomb; but his response was so heavily underlined in its attempted playfulness that the reader fidgets uneasily. In the sonnet "Bursting Rapture," for example, he goes to the physician to complain that there's so much "science" around these days that "the discipline of farming" is too stern a one to be practiced:

> It seemed as if I couldn't stand the strain.
> But the physician's answer was, "There, there,
> What you complain of, all the nations share.
> Their effort is a mounting ecstasy
> That when it gets too exquisite to bear
> Will find relief in one burst. You shall see.
> That's what a certain bomb was sent to be."

In this untroubled move from a trumped-up personal complaint to the assertion that it is one shared by all nations and that relief is just a burst away as—in the unfortunate final line—that "certain bomb" fulfills its mission, there is a failure of taste and of scale. The sonnet form is trotted out once more and given only the smallest rhythmic interest; the sentence sounds are undistinguished—yet the homemade apocalypse joke is supposed to be rousing.

This sort of thing occurs too often in Frost's late verse, especially when the poet is so programmatically mischievous, his eyes all atwinkle with disillusioned, clever-tough patter. When for a time it looked as if America, Britain, and Russia were the three powers in the postwar world, Frost wrote a sonnet ("No Holy Wars for Them") mocking the little states ("Good is a thing that they, the great, can do, / But puny little states can only be"). In the poem's sestet he turned to God for His word on the whole matter:

> God, have You taken cognizance of this?
> And what on this is Your divine position?
> That nations like the Cuban and the Swiss
> Can never hope to wage a Global Mission.
> No Holy Wars for them. The most the small
> Can ever give us is a nuisance brawl.

Amusing enough perhaps, but complacent as well: herein speaks the Big Voice of the hugely successful poet who has seen them come and go. If the career that began in felicity were to end in publicity and in poems like "No Holy Wars for Them," maybe—the reader feels—it had better really *end* there. Yet to complain that Frost's late poems are inferior to the others is to indulge in the complacency one has identified in the poems. Instead, they should be put in their place, which is a small one, and seen as relatively weak manifestations of what on other fronts still revealed itself—never more so—as a quite unbelievable energy of performance.

In Robert Lowell's sonnet about Frost, this performance is referred to as "the great act." It begins, "Robert Frost at midnight, the audience gone / to vapor, the great act laid on the shelf in mothballs, / his voice is musical and raw . . . ," and proceeds by artfully deploying a conversation between Lowell and Frost in which each man subtly and significantly misunderstands the other, thus making for unexpected and vivid jumps in their exchanges.

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Lowell's poem probably originated from a remembered, late-night conversation, and Lowell is different from others only insofar as he was able to summon up and shape the memory into art. For countless people remember their conversations with Frost, remember him *talking*, moving from subject to subject, pausing over something, turning it around, playing with it, varying his tone from gentle to harsh to scarcely definable—so that the listener would say afterward, "How did he mean that?" We recall the woman accusing her husband in "Home Burial": "*You*—oh you think the talk is all." At this late stage in Frost's life, the "talk" had indeed become just about "all." It seemed to more than one listener that such talk had never been heard before and probably never would be again—that was the extent of the spellbinding.

At Amherst College, to which he returned in 1949 with an appointment for life as Simpson Lecturer, his only function was to talk. For roughly two weeks in the fall and a similar period in the spring, he came to town, gave a single large public reading in the chapel, then made a few smaller appearances. He would read some poems and talk to students at a fraternity; he would go out to dinner at one or another faculty member's house, and after dinner hold the floor until the people with classes the next day made their apologies and left. When he was accompanied home, usually on foot, to the inn where he stayed, he would offer to walk the accompanier back a ways in the other direction, then having reached a certain point would suggest that the accompanier walk *him* back toward the inn. This game could go on for some time. As long as he commanded the power of his speaking voice, no evening would have to end.

In a sense he had always acted as if he could say anything and get away with it; his friendship with Bernard De Voto was a case in point. At Bread Loaf in the summer of 1938, after his wife Elinor's death, Frost had behaved in erratic, destructive ways, drinking and talking wildly, testing the limits of his friends' patience. De Voto's patience was tried to the extent that he made the remark (to Frost's ears) about how he was a good poet but a bad man. Some years later they found themselves together at a writers' conference in Bloomington, Indiana, where Frost engaged De Voto in intimate conversations; then, after the latter left town, he told faculty members at a dinner that De Voto was under the care of a psychiatrist who had warned him not to associate with Frost, since the latter's strong personality had a bad effect on him. This tale got back to De Voto, who then wrote Frost a sharp letter telling him in no uncertain terms to desist. Frost responded with a long letter beginning "Benny, Benny!" referring to himself as a "disappointed novelist" and defending the "story" he had told by saying, "I wouldn't have thought it hurt either of us and it makes us both more amusing." The presumption behind this claim, which, so the logic ran, De Voto had not been quite big enough to accommodate, was that the power of the storyteller rendered questions of truthfulness, privacy, or confidentiality insignificant; such matters were of little weight when compared with the inclination, the necessity, to be "amusing," and by invention to render both the teller and his subject more interesting. One could term Frost's response as a rather desperate attempt to save face; yet there is in his letter a truly surprised note that De Voto could have failed to be amused by the inventive—at least invented—story that "the disappointed novelist" had been telling about him.

In the words from Auden's poem about Yeats, Frost "became his admirers," sometimes, as in the difficulty with De Voto, "becoming" them in enthusiastic ways they could not live up to, having other concerns in their lives besides admiring Frost. The final volume of Lawrance Thompson's biography (completed by R. H. Winnick) is devoted mainly to enumerating Frost's honors, as one by one this medal or that degree was bestowed on him. His remark that he needed all the honors he could get is understood by his biographers as further confirmation of his insecurity: "The doubters now were all believers, but the old inner doubts remained. Only the steady influx of objectified praise could quiet the fear he had that everything he had achieved would somehow slip away." But if this way of understanding Frost's need is supposed to distinguish him from other artists, it does not so distinguish him from Samuel Johnson, who, when a friend tried to assure him that there was already sufficient evidence for the existence of a spiritual world, replied, "I LIKE TO HAVE MORE." Like Dr.

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Johnson, Frost knew firsthand the "hunger of imagination which preys incessantly upon life" (*Rasselas*), and the need to have all the honors he could get became more intense as the poems grew less frequent, less substantial, as other people became or were transformed into listeners and admirers, and as the thought of death—when everything does indeed slip away—became more present.

One of the most imaginative things Frost did with all those honors was to have the hoods from his various honorary degrees made into a quilt. But the quilt was presented to him before it could have included the most coveted and impressive of the academic prizes he received in his last years—the award of degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge, in 1957. As with so much else in his career, this welcome tribute did not just happen but was actively sought out by the poet who let it be known that he would be visiting England as a "distinguished representative of the American cultural scene." This language, as used in a letter from Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, was prompted by Frost through the offices of his friend in power, Sherman Adams, Special Assistant to President Eisenhower. Oxford and Cambridge duly responded by inviting him to receive a degree, and thus he could look upon the going back in triumph to England as icing on the cake: "I have had about everything I can have in my own country. Now for the mother country," he wrote Lawrance Thompson, who was to accompany him.

Although unwell at certain points during this exciting and exhausting month's stay in England and Dublin (besides the Oxford and Cambridge degree visits, he went to Durham, Manchester, and once more to his old Gloucestershire haunts of 1914), the whole venture was a triumph. Perhaps its high point occurred when, at a London dinner, the toastmaster, T. S. Eliot, saluted him as "perhaps *the* most eminent, the most distinguished, I must call it, Anglo-American poet now living." This, from the Eliot who, thirty-five years previously in his "London Letter" for *The Dial*, had characterized Frost as "specializing in New England torpor" and had regretted that "his verse . . . is uninteresting, and what is uninteresting is unreadable." Perhaps Eliot slowly or suddenly changed his mind about Frost's merits; or perhaps at the public level that both poets had by then achieved, talk about eminence and distinction was simply the currency of the realm. Frost responded in kind, acknowledging the remarks by insisting that there was nobody living in either England or America from whom he would rather hear such praise. This, from one who had been repelled by Eliot's obscurity and whose attitude toward *The Waste Land* was contemptuous.

It is a relief, amid one triumphant occasion after another, to find a single occasion on which something untoward happened. At a Savile Club dinner, he was invited by Stephen Spender to reminisce about his stay in England early in the century. Frost began to oblige but was soon bothered by the smiling and chuckling of one of the guests whose name he had not caught. Taking matters into his own hands, he challenged the man by asking him what he was "giggling" at. The unidentified guest, embarrassed, fell silent. Later, as the party broke up, he was identified as E. M. Forster, whose feelings had evidently been hurt by Frost's challenge. Informed of this, Frost wrote Forster a letter of apology and later visited him at his King's College rooms. But there is a symbolic satisfaction in the awkward occurrence at the dinner table. Here was a moment when Frost was invited to speak, to a table surrounded by ready admirers, and something went wrong; one of them responded in an inappropriate way, out of motives that cannot be named with any certainty. Was Forster genuinely amused and unable to control his vocal expression of pleasure? Was he indeed out of control, tipsy, or on the edge of senility? It matters less than that he managed to discomfit Frost, indeed to provoke him into aggressive behavior, unusual at the Savile Club. And then to find afterward that the giggler was in fact E. M. Forster, defender of the liberal imagination and of tolerance, good humor, and sympathy! It seemed to show that even under the most auspicious circumstances it was possible to have an imperfect fit between American and English culture, between the farmer-poet and the apostle of civilization from King's, between roughness and urbanity, between two kinds of humor. Not even Frost's speaking voice was able, on this occasion, to completely reconcile the antinomies.

The degrees from Oxford and Cambridge

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were looked upon by him as "sort of round-[ing] off my rather great academic career in general." In putting it this way, with the strategically placed "rather," he made with humorous style an audacious claim, and as with others he had made, the claim was a mixture of seriousness and joking. It was a "rather great academic career" because it was so completely unlike anything that could claim to be considered as a truly great academic career. Here he was at his old trick of formulating something that wouldn't quite formulate: of making an academic career out of asking things like "Why do they have classes?" or of giving a student an "A" for an examination on which he had written nothing. Never did one see him more warmly received by students, and by college presidents, than when he would turn his wit to mocking the professors, those literal-minded, humorless souls who kept trying to turn "Stopping By Woods . . ." into a poem about suicide, or who committed other offenses against good taste and good sense. To poke fun at the academy, its procedures and its discourse, to disparage the very idea of a classroom and the teachers who insisted on explaining everything, and then to receive so many honorary degrees from colleges and universities that one had to have them made up into a quilt—this surely was a superb way to "round off" an academic career.

But it was not merely on the academic stage that Frost was convinced he had a role to play. His part in the release of Ezra Pound from St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington was an example, so it seemed to him, of how successfully public events could be shaped and important people moved to change their position, if only they would listen to his advice. The move to secure Pound's release from St. Elizabeth's, where he had been confined since 1946, was engineered by Archibald MacLeish, who in 1957 had the effective idea of putting Frost's name at the head of a list (also containing Hemingway and T. S. Eliot) of distinguished American men of letters requesting that Pound be released, since he was a distinguished poet and had suffered enough for his ill-advised broadcasts from Italy during World War II. A meeting was arranged between Frost, Sherman Adams, and Attorney General William Rogers, whose position on releasing Pound had become less intransigent. In fact, by the time Frost visited Rogers (Hemingway and Eliot did not come to Washington—MacLeish knew that Frost was his strongest card) the mood of the Eisenhower administration had swung round toward dismissing the charges against Pound, who had already been judged incompetent to stand trial for treason. The whole carefully orchestrated procedure was a triumph of MacLeish's astute planning, but what is interesting for purposes of Frost's portrait is the way in which he convinced himself and told others how sweepingly and abruptly the deed had been effected. "I've dropped in to see what your mood is in regard to Ezra Pound," he said he had announced to Rogers at their meeting, to which the Attorney General had replied, "Our mood is your mood, Mr. Frost." "Well, then, let's get him out right away," said Frost.

Whatever else the Attorney General may have told him during their conversation, the punch line—"Our mood is your mood, Mr. Frost"—perfectly epitomizes the way Frost understood the situation and was surely the way he wanted to have it understood by those to whom he told it. MacLeish's elaborate planning was forgotten in the ease with which, in Frost's story, Washington red tape was cut through by directness ("I've dropped in to see what your mood is in regard to Ezra Pound") and no-nonsense clarity ("Well, then, let's get him out right away"). This is not to imply that his part in effecting Pound's release was not significant, but that the ground had been fully prepared. Here was the quintessential American poet, whose magnanimity could be displayed as a convincing reason for letting Pound go. Immediately after the success with Pound, he was offered a job succeeding Jarrell as Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress, for nine months beginning in the fall of 1958. In an interview with the press the day the appointment was announced, he referred to his recent "success" in Washington, saying humorously that his reputation was now more for "politics" than "poetry." He allowed that he possessed "wiles," and finally remarked, apropos of Pound's release, "All I did was the whole thing." One recalls the ditty he was fond of repeating: "I only go / When I'm the show."

What begins in felicity ends in publicity. Those who thought of themselves as serious

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admirers of Frost's poetry were inclined to wince at this sort of self-congratulation carried on in front of people, most of whom couldn't have told a sonnet from an epic. When, in fact, the Library of Congress job turned out to have little of the importance Frost imagined it might have, he joked about it: "I wondered if I hadn't come down here on a misunderstanding. I thought I was to be poetry consultant in everything—poetry, politics, religion, science. I'll tackle anything." Of course he would have, as he had been doing for years. But his light tone should not obscure the seriousness of this fantasy of power, the dream of a boy's will grown old but retaining its youthful capacity for demanding that the world come round to it. In a line from a poem ("Escapist—Never") published in 1962, the year before he died, "His life is a pursuit of a pursuit forever." Yet a sinecure at the Library of Congress was not the situation in which Frost could begin to live up to his imagined version of heroism—of tackling anything and by so doing making a real difference in the nature of things.

It is all too easy to look back on these last years of public, international acclaim in the fifties and early sixties and regret his being taken in by the hoopla, his having succumbed to the public figure's consciousness of himself. This impulse toward patronizing him may be checked by reminding ourselves that there were moments of weariness, of doubt, of the suspicion that there must be something specious about at least part of the celebration now joined in on by all parties. What, for example, were the feelings, if any, that lay behind his response to the Vermont state legislature, which passed a bill designating him "Poet Laureate of Vermont"? When acknowledging the honor, Frost produced this four-line poem:

> Breathes there a bard who isn't moved
> When he finds his verse is understood
> And not entirely disapproved
> By his country and his neighborhood?

There is nothing in these artful lines that suggests he was not pleased at getting one more honor. Yet is it not possible to imagine him somewhat less than "moved" by the idea that those Vermont legislators "understood" and approved of his poetry, even if such humorous or skeptical comment was confined to his private thoughts?

The public occasion on which something more like the full range of his personality was expressed was the famous eighty-fifth birthday party held in 1959, when Lionel Trilling gave a speech saluting Frost as "terrifying": a "tragic poet" whose work conceived of a "terrifying universe." Trilling made heavy use of D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* in order to ally Frost with what Lawrence said classic American writers had done. They were radicals committed to sloughing off the old European consciousness, and they did this not by affirming old virtues and pieties, but by representing "the terrible actualities of life in a new way." Frost's response to Trilling's salute was somewhat halting and uncertain. He may well have had difficulty hearing it all or putting it together consecutively, and he was surely disturbed by being praised in Lawrentian terms. Also, he confessed to being especially "nervous" that night. The next day he met Trilling for a friendly chat, and later when Trilling published the speech in *Partisan Review* and sent him a copy—with the hope that his remarks hadn't "distressed" him—Frost replied, "Not distressed at all. Just a little taken aback or thrown back on myself by being so closely examined so close by." And he praised Trilling for "departing from the Rotarian norm in a Rotarian situation."

When Trilling published the speech, he prefaced it by an introduction describing the outraged reaction to it from some quarters (J. Donald Adams's contemptuous account of it in the *Times Book Review* drew forth angry letters from people who hadn't heard the speech but didn't want their image of Frost disturbed) and subtitled it "A Cultural Episode." Perhaps it was in fact a cultural episode, rather than the close examination Frost felt he had been given. For Trilling mentioned only two particular poems, and those only in passing, to illustrate that Frost conceived of a "terrifying universe." The poems were "Design" and "Neither Out Far nor In Deep," both of which Jarrell had selected and analyzed at length a few years before, as indications of the "dark" Frost. At the risk of being ungenerous to Trilling, it looks as if, asked to give a speech for the birthday celebration, he remembered the Jarrell essay and

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used it to build a case for Frost as a "radical" critic of American life. But in this lively departure from the "Rotarian norm," he made his own simplification of Frost's art into a melodramatic rendering of terrifying, terrible darkness. In so doing he discounted, or at least did not pay serious attention to, the humor, the irony, the mischief, the teasing, the playfulness. It is probably true, as Richard Poirier points out, that Frost was committed to "reinstate" rather than obliterate the old virtues and pieties that Lawrence had said the important American literary tradition was out to destroy. But it is certain that he was a harder figure to pin down than Trilling imagined, as he went about pinning Frost down to the "tragic" mat. One can imagine that Frost perceived something of this when he was made "nervous" by the talk.

Whatever one thought of Trilling's speech as an adequate description of Frost's poetry, it was important for the way it stimulated argument about the poetry at a time when it was mostly receiving pious accolades. If the simplifications of the speech about the "terrifying" aspect of Frost's poetry were just exciting and uncomplex enough to allow people to latch on to them, they were also salutary in that they encouraged looking at him as something other than an affirmer of American pieties in the 1950s. It may well have been that Trilling's rather sensational version of things made Frost more interesting to himself; at any rate, he continued to act as if there was great felicity in all the publicity. As poetry consultant at the Library of Congress, he had insisted that he was ready to tackle anything, and at a press conference on the morning of the day that would close with Trilling's birthday speech, he was asked by a reporter about New England—was it in decay? In reply, Frost adduced the vitality of Harvard and Yale, predicted that the successor to Secretary Dulles (who was dying) would be from Boston (Under Secretary Christian Herter), and that the next president would also be from Boston. When pressed by the reporters to say whom he meant, he eventually produced the name of John Kennedy, a "Puritan from Boston." The headlines made by this pronouncement were sufficient to elicit a note from Senator Kennedy and later, after the 1960 elections, an invitation to participate in the inaugural ceremonies.

What happened is a familiar but still inspiring story of disaster transformed into triumph. Frost had worked feverishly on a new poem in couplets (and the occasional triplet): seventy-six lines in celebration of America's history, of how "Our venture in revolution and outlawry / Has justified itself in freedom's story / Right down to now in glory upon glory." The poem spread on the glory pretty thick, with such un-sublime events as Kennedy's recent election squeak-through against Richard Nixon becoming, in Frost's tribute, "the greatest vote a people ever cast, / So close yet sure to be abided by." About the mood of the moment he declared, "Courage is in the air in bracing whiffs," and the poem ended in a mood as exalted and exultant as Dryden's "Astraea Redux" or Pope's "Windsor Forest," poems prophetic of the English Augustan Age. Frost called for a life that would be "sterner," "braver," with "more preoccupation with the sport," and he declared that

> It makes the prophet in us all presage
> The glory of a next Augustan age
> Of a power leading from its strength and pride,
> Of young ambition eager to be tried,
> Firm in our free beliefs without dismay,
> In any game the nations want to play.
> A golden age of poetry and power
> Of which this noonday's the beginning hour.

In these lines the boy's will came full circle, if in a slightly disturbing way. As Frost had pretended, at the beginning of his career, that the will could make circumstances other than they are, so the career culminated in a fantasy of willing the realities of modern power politics into an alliterative "golden age of poetry and power." In this age, America, heroic as she would become, was ready to play any "game" the nations wanted to play (one thinks now, unavoidably, of the Bay of Pigs invasion). In this inaugural poem, Frost presented himself as laureate of the new age by projecting on it the vocabulary of prowess and performance and play he now used as second nature. It was some kind of ultimate finding of felicity in publicity.

Except that, on the occasion, he was unable to read more than a few lines of the poem, troubled as he was by the sun's glare on that bright, cold January day, but troubled at least as much by the poem's newness to him, his unfamiliarity with, and uncertainty about, the

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way it went. Or perhaps, as he had been wont to say about himself, it was a sort of judgment. He had been tempted to believe that it was a great occasion at which he would perform—not just a transfer of power from one party to another, both of which were filled with politicians. Like many others, he conceived the new president as Young Lochinvar, the perfect combination of spirit and flesh, passion and toughness, poetry and reality, Harvard and Irish. It was almost as if, in the language of his poem "Kitty Hawk," Kennedy had been sent "As a demonstration / That the supreme merit / Lay in risking spirit / In substantiation." And Frost wrote the extravagant words about the "next Augustan age" as if, by proclaiming them, he could help it come into being, could substantiate it. But the poet was old, the flesh was weak, and he could not utter the words he had written. At this moment of disaster, he called on some resource and rose to a level in every way superior to the pumped-up one of the new poem's advertisement. Putting behind him the stumbling uncertainties of voice and tone that characterized his attempt to deliver the new poem, he fell back on an old one he knew perfectly, and in the most splendidly commanding of voices read "The Gift Outright" impeccably: "The land was ours before we were the land's." His performance thus attained a dramatic, even a heroic, quality that it would otherwise have lacked if things had gone off perfectly. The imperfect version had more of "life" in it: in the midst of flattery and display, the sound of sense suddenly and movingly made itself felt.

If the performance at the inauguration represents victory snatched from the jaws of defeat, the trip to Russia and the meeting with Khrushchev must be reckoned less happily, at least in its aftermath. The final lesson appeared to be that poetry and power went together only in poems, and that to prophesy—as Frost had done—a golden age, then try to help bring it about, was a course fraught with peril. These terms for judging the event may be excessive ones, but Frost invested heavily in the notion that a meeting with Khrushchev and a frank exchange of views might contribute to a new relationship between the superpowers founded upon the principle of rivalry. Franklin Reeve, the scholar and interpreter who, along with Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, accompanied him on the trip to Russia in September 1962, said that when Frost and Khrushchev finally met, "he [Frost] told the Premier that there should be no petty squabbles, that there must be a noble rivalry between Russia and the United States, forcefully and magnanimously pressed by the leaders of both sides." There would be an end to propaganda and name-calling, and a forthright recognition of each other's greatness and power. Khrushchev was perceived as agreeing with these sentiments.

The meeting between them was heightened by the uncertainty over whether it was ever to materialize and by the fact that Frost was ill. Upon arriving at Khrushchev's summer home in the Caucasus, Frost went to bed, welcoming the Premier, when he eventually arrived, in his pajamas. From Reeve's account Khrushchev was at his most charming, and there is every reason to believe that the two men genuinely took to each other. (Frost liked to refer to him as a "ruffian," a name denoting qualities he admired.) After the hour-and-a-half conversation was over and Khrushchev had left, Frost dropped back on the bed and said, according to Reeve, "Well, we did it, didn't we? He knows what power is and isn't afraid to take hold of it. He's a great man, all right." It was clear to him that Khrushchev possessed the latter of the two qualities that would figure in the "golden age of poetry and power" he had written about in the inaugural poem. Who could say that he might not rise to poetry as well, to "magnanimity" in his rivalry with the United States?

Thus Frost returned from Russia with the sense of having accomplished something and with the expectation or hope that Kennedy would summon him for a conversation. As is well known, this never happened—to Frost's deep regret. It is not clear whether he knew he had annoyed Kennedy, but such was the case. Upon landing at Idlewild after the long flight home, he was surrounded by reporters wanting to know what he had talked about with Khrushchev, and by way of answer he gave them to believe that the Premier had said he feared for "us modern liberals"—"He said we were too liberal to fight." For years, of course, he had been baiting "liberals" as hesitant, over-thoughtful types who shirked the realities of power recognized by Khrushchev, Kennedy, and himself. Any opportu-

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nity to tease liberals was eagerly sought out; but it was a mistake to indulge himself when the stakes were international ones, and though he claimed to have a message for Kennedy from Khrushchev that he was ready to deliver, an invitation was not forthcoming (Stewart Udall had reported to Kennedy that Khrushchev did *not* make the remark about liberals). Thus the tale ended as a cautionary one in which Frost found that "cutting up," as he had done at the airport, was more appropriate on the poetry lecture circuit than in the theater of international relations. Still, except for its very end, the trip to Russia by the old poet in the last months of his life, still filled with the most ambitious imaginings and aspirations, is a fine thing to contemplate. He almost brought it off.

It may be only retrospection that makes it seem as if, in the late fall of 1962, Frost knew the end was in sight. *In the Clearing* had, after many delays, been published in the previous March to a response that could at best be called polite. There had been a large eighty-eighth birthday party in Washington, at which he presented a copy of his new book to President Kennedy; then came the Russian adventure with its less than glorious conclusion. In late November and early December of the year, he made what were to be his last two public appearances, the first of them at the newly opened Hopkins Center at Dartmouth. There he delivered his usual blend of talking and reading from his poetry; it was posthumously published as "On Extravagance"—his main theme for the evening. Five days later, he made his annual Ford Forum appearance at Jordan Hall in Boston. The Dartmouth talk celebrated "extravagance," the extravagance of the universe, and of man as "the most wasteful, spending thing in it—in all his luxuriance." Poetry was an "extravagance about grief," springing from great impulses, such as the impulse to say, "It sometimes seems as if" or (as he would repeat in the Ford Forum talk) "If I could only tell you." After reading various poems, including "The Most of It" and "Never Again Would Birds' Song . . ." as examples of extravagance, he ended with a short one from *Steeple Bush* that he seldom read aloud. The first in the group called *Five Nocturnes*, it was titled "The Night Light":

> She always had to burn a light
> Beside her attic bed at night.
> It gave bad dreams and broken sleep,
> But helped the Lord her soul to keep.
> Good gloom on her was thrown away.
> It is on me by night or day,
> Who have, as I suppose, ahead
> The darkest of it still to dread.

"Suppose I end on that dark note. Good night," he concluded his talk. It was an unusual place for him to end, and carried a hint that the foreseeing "I" in the poem had a human counterpart in the old and tired poet.

At the Ford Forum he acknowledged that he wasn't feeling well ("I'm a little tired. . . . I've been sick") but nevertheless gave a full performance. It was one final attempt to set poetry above various "contentions"—like politics, the academy, religion—by thinking of it as something "in itself"—"like a street song . . . it wants to be catchy." Poetry should be above "satire," and it was at war with "music," since the poem was a song in itself without being set to music (he may have had in mind the recent experience of hearing some of his poems in settings by the composer Randall Thompson). That night the poems he read went rather pointedly back to *A Boy's Will*, and he said about "October" (one of three he read) that it was "innocent of everything I know of." He emphasized the importance of making the individual tunes different from each other, but seemed to take most pleasure in tracing out, with his speaking voice, the expressive curve of an utterance. With animated excitement he read and repeated a six-line poem, "Questioning Faces," published in his last volume:

> The winter owl banked just in time to pass
> And save himself from breaking window glass.
> And her wings straining suddenly aspread
> Caught color from the last of evening red
> In a display of underdown and quill
> To glassed-in children at the windowsill.

Like "October," this was a poem "innocent" of just about everything; a song in itself without being set to music. It makes its own music by the way its second couplet does not, like the first one, come full stop at its end, but continues on into the splendid "display of underdown and quill," a momentary extravagance those glassed-in children were so fortu-

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nate, whether or not they knew it, to have seen. "You remember that . . . ," Frost said to the audience about the poem, the insistence being that they had been able to share something common in experience, by virtue of the writing being just uncommon enough to illuminate it.

That night he ended, rather abruptly, with "The Road Not Taken," but then after saying good night stayed on to answer questions, the main one of which concerned his Russian trip. Having been burned once, he disclaimed the remark he had formerly attributed to Khrushchev, and also disclaimed any thought that he had been "arranging" anything. He had gone over, rather, "to assert my own thinking" in the face of the Premier (who was described this time as "like a great big horse-trader") and to promote a "grand rivalry" between the powers. He spoke calmly, without boasting, in such a way that the listener would be hard put not to feel that, after all, what he had done was quite wonderful—a perfect example of his tribute to extravagance in the Dartmouth talk, in which the universe was both the model of "great expense" and productive of it in the aspirations of man—"everybody trying to make it mean something more than it is."

Then somebody from the audience asked him to read from "Two Tramps in Mud Time." After saying the last stanza about work being "play for mortal stakes," he moved on to talk about life as a "gamble." It was all "gamblin'," and one had to bet nothing less than one's life; indeed, he said, one of the "sweetest" of all expressions was "You bet your sweet life." There was "nothing to life" unless one could say, "I bet my sweet life on this." "That's what takes it away from everybody but yourself," he continued. "Nobody's gonna run you." And if the bet, the gamble, turned out disastrously, well then, "The most inalienable right of man is to go to hell in his own way." He spoke of his own life as a gamble: he was gambling every time he opened the day's mail, each week when some person or other changed his opinion of him. Then, in another one of those moments when he seemed to stand aside and look at things from a long way off, as if he were no longer quite a part of them, he laughed briefly and announced, "It's a wonderful world"—after which he added, evenly, "To hell with it." The audience was uncertain whether to laugh, and after one further anticlimactic question, the proceedings were terminated.

So ended his last public performance. It was almost seventy years since he had been introduced by the Congregational minister to the men's club at Derry, and had had "The Tuft of Flowers" read aloud because he was too shy to do it himself. That night at Jordan Hall he read aloud "The Tuft of Flowers" on his own, insisting once more that the mower had spared the flowers "just because he liked them." In a similar vein, he wanted the audience to think of his reading that night as innocent of everything except itself: "You can't suspect me tonight of being political . . . or anything but somewhat poetical, at the risk of my life." And he read a poem ("Away!") from his new volume, which seemed as if it were about something besides going for just another walk and which ended with the following instructions:

> Don't think I leave
> For the outer dark
> Like Adam and Eve
> Put out of the Park.
>
> Forget the myth.
> There is no one I
> Am put out with
> Or put out by.
>
> Unless I'm wrong
> I but obey
> The urge of a song:
> "I'm—bound—away!"
>
> And I may return
> If dissatisfied
> With what I learn
> From having died.

The next day, December 3, 1962, after much effort by Kathleen Morrison and his doctor, he was persuaded to enter Peter Bent Brigham Hospital for an operation on his prostate.

He had predicted that if he entered there he would never leave, and such was to be the case. Even though it revealed cancer of the bladder, the operation was a success, but while recuperating from it he suffered a pulmonary embolism, causing damage to his heart. This was followed, in the first week of the new year, by a second embolism, then a rapidly weakening condition. Two weeks be-

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fore he died, he dictated a letter to his friend and former colleague George Roy Elliot and his wife Alma, thanking them for liking the poem he had sent them at Christmas. He told the Elliots he had been thinking about the problem of salvation, and that just that day had been saying how "Christ posed Himself the whole problem and died for it." The problem was:

> How can we be just in a world that needs mercy and merciful in a world that needs justice. We study and study the four biographies of Him and are left still somewhat puzzled in our daily lives. Marking students in a kind of mockery and laughing it off. It seems as I never wrote these plunges into the depths to anyone but you.

Earlier in the letter he had declared that "metaphor is it and the freshness thereof." In the effort to show—despite the Gospels and their truth, despite our knowledge that we must combine justice with mercy—that we are "puzzled" about what to do, he reached for metaphor. There came the flash of poetry, as he embodied the puzzlement to his old academic colleague: "Marking students in a kind of mockery and laughing it off." In this almost offhand metaphor was revealed the confusion existing under the presumed clarity of a final grade; bitter, knowing, and wistful all at once, the metaphor was dropped as quickly as it was picked up. But it had been a plunge into the depths.

In the concluding paragraph of his letter to the Elliots, he paid tribute to Kathleen Morrison and her daughter, who he said were helping him "through these hard days in a grand and very powerful hospital." And he promised his correspondents that, "if only I get well, with their help, I'll go deeper into my life with you than I ever have before." It was not to be. Yet the going deeper into life had already occurred, as perhaps the Elliots surmised, in the letter just concluded—in the freshness of metaphor, which was a plunge into the depths as well. For the last time, Frost's promise had been performed in the making of it.

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Gray Eminence

RICHARD MAYNE

He had his back turned when I first saw him—a stocky figure in an old brown overcoat and a gray broad-brimmed hat. He had just come in, and was speaking on the telephone. His voice was dry, husky, and quick.

"*Très bien*, and don't forget the chicken for eight o'clock." Then, picking up the receiver again: "Get me Adenauer." Waiting for the call, he turned to greet me. Under the hat, his face was ruddy. His eyebrows were raised over hooded, twinkling eyes. He had a small clipped mustache. He looked faintly Chinese, and very like a peasant. "*Comment ça va?*" His handshake was firm and friendly.

We were standing in an old-fashioned apartment on the Avenue Foch in Paris, overlooking the Bois de Boulogne. The ancient elevator creaked; so did the parquet flooring. The double doors were glazed and covered with lace curtains. In such a setting, telephones seemed as incongruous as typewriters, steel desks, and filing cabinets. The place might have been requisitioned by some occupying force. In a sense it had, for these few crowded rooms were the headquarters of a multinational political group whose aim was to transform Europe. Its members were the non-Communist and non-Gaullist parties and labor unions of the six countries then forming the European Community: France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Its title, a touch rhetorical, was the Action Committee for the United States of Europe. Its work was practical, thorough, and effective. Its founder and president was postwar Europe's gray eminence, Jean Monnet.

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At that time, in 1956, Monnet was sixty-seven, and looked about fifty-five. He was already a legend. "Mr. Europe" was one of his press nicknames; "the father of Europe" was another. He demurred at both. "Don't you mean 'grandfather'?" he asked an interviewer. He disliked metaphors: but this one was apt. Parenthood takes two; and Monnet believed in collective action. His role was that of catalyst. In 1950, he had persuaded Robert Schuman, the French foreign minister, to propose the Schuman Plan for a European Coal and Steel Community. To some, coal and steel seemed technical. To Monnet, they were raw materials for war which could now be used to secure the peace. A mere five years after World War II had ended, Monnet was proposing that former enemies join forces—that France and Germany "place the whole of Franco-German coal and steel production under a common High Authority open to the participation of the other countries of Europe." Soon, France and Germany were joined by Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Monnet chaired the conference to negotiate a treaty, and became the first president of the coal-steel "High Authority."

This, in his view, was only a beginning. Some weeks after launching the Schuman Plan, Monnet had proposed to René Pleven, the French premier, the Pleven Plan for a European Defense Community with a supranational army. As things turned out, it was too much too soon. In 1954, bitterly attacked by the extremes of both Left and Right, the Defense Community treaty failed to pass the French National Assembly. With it, a further project collapsed—the draft treaty for a Political Community, worked out by Europe's parliamentarians.

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At that point, many feared that the whole enterprise of uniting Europe would come to a halt. But Monnet was not easily discouraged. Within a few months, leading Europeans were discussing what they called "the relaunching of Europe." By this they meant two new proposals from Monnet—although, as usual, he was promoting them through powerful intermediaries: the Dutch foreign minister, Johan Willem Beyen, and his Belgian counterpart Paul-Henri Spaak. The first plan was for Euratom, an Atomic Energy Community to control the peaceful applications of nuclear technology. The second was for a European Economic Community, the so-called Common Market.

By now, Monnet had left the High Authority and was recruiting his Action Committee. Month after month, while governments discussed the new projects and parliaments debated the eventual treaties, the Action Committee maintained its pressure. When the new Communities began, it kept in close touch with their executive bodies, smoothing out political problems, suggesting useful initiatives, and helping to ensure parliamentary and trade-union support. Behind the scenes, Monnet worked assiduously to initiate equal partnership between the European Community and the United States; he also, despite many setbacks, at length succeeded in enlarging the Community to include Britain, Denmark, and Ireland. His last political achievement before he died in 1979 at the age of ninety was to persuade the Community's governments to turn their regular summit meetings into a permanent institution—the European Council. Privately, Monnet saw this as a provisional government. One of its first acts was to confer on him the title of Honorary Citizen of Europe.

Such is the traditional story. It smacks a little of the pious *image d'Epinal*. "If a united Europe is created in our time," wrote Theodore White, "then Jean Monnet will probably be revered centuries hence as its patron saint." Perhaps he will. But he was more complex than many saints or than most hagiographers; and even if he had never pioneered the uniting of Europe, his role in world events would have earned him a place in history. By the time that he was president of the European Community's first executive, he had reached an age at which others contemplate retirement, and he had already pursued an astonishing career.

In two world wars, Monnet made a crucial contribution to the cause of the Allies. In the first, while still in his twenties, he persuaded the French prime minister to stop Britain and France bidding against each other for scarce supplies; and he was put in charge of their joint efforts. After World War I, he helped to promote the League of Nations, and became its deputy secretary-general. He left to rescue and reorganize the Monnet family business, then became an international banker and adviser to governments. In Sweden he helped to liquidate the Kreuger match empire: in Shanghai, he raised capital for the Chinese railroads. Along the way, he contracted a runaway marriage.

As World War II approached, Monnet secured for France much-needed American aircraft, later allotted to Britain. In 1939, he was once more appointed to coordinate Anglo-French supplies. In 1940, with France on the brink of capitulation, he persuaded de Gaulle and Churchill to back his abortive plan for a Franco-British union which would have kept her in the war. Soon afterward, he went to Washington—as a British civil servant, with his French passport endorsed by Churchill himself. He coined President Roosevelt's slogan "the arsenal of democracy," and played a key part in the subsequent Victory Program. In Algiers, in 1943, he managed to reconcile de Gaulle and General Giraud, preventing discord and possible bloodshed in France. As a member of de Gaulle's provisional government, he proposed and then headed the post-war Commissariat au Plan. He was involved in the Marshall Plan; and in 1951 he was even recruited by NATO's Atlantic Council as one of "three wise men"—another was Averell Harriman—to assess the economic effect of the Western Alliance.

Monnet's multifarious activities earned him innumerable tributes. Lord Keynes believed that he had helped to shorten World War II by a whole year. Konrad Adenauer called him "a true man of peace." For Willy Brandt he was "a wise counsellor"; for Edward Heath "a constant source of inspiration." Dean Acheson described him as "one of the greatest of Frenchmen"; and the United States diplomat Robert Murphy, who once clashed with Monnet, nevertheless thought him "in many

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respects more remarkable than de Gaulle."

De Gaulle's relations with Monnet were sporadic, but more friendly than some people supposed. In 1953, attacking the project for a European Defense Community, de Gaulle lampooned Monnet—without naming him—as "the inspirer" of "supranational monstrosities." A few years later, I remember, Monnet turned from listening to de Gaulle on the radio and exclaimed, "*Il est fou!*" But this was a momentary outburst. When the General died, it happened to be Monnet's birthday; and he frowned with real pain at any tasteless allusion to "birthday presents." When I asked him whether de Gaulle had helped or hindered the uniting of Europe, Monnet was silent for nearly half a minute. Then he said: "I think both."

They had first met in the dark days of 1940. One evening in June, de Gaulle and his aide-de-camp Geoffroy de Courcel came to dine in Monnet's London apartment. When they arrived, Monnet was still in his office. In his memoirs he described how his wife Silvia had welcomed the General, then asked how long his mission in London would last. "I am not here on a mission, Madame," de Gaulle replied: "I am here to save the honor of France." In conversation, Monnet added a piquant detail. Madame Monnet had been sitting on one side of the fireplace, de Courcel on the other. Standing between them, tall and austere, de Gaulle drew from his pocket the text of his next day's broadcast to France. But, instead of giving it to Madame Monnet, he passed it to de Courcel, who had to get up, walk round, and hand it to her. It was a gesture worthy of a head of state.

That night, Monnet told me, he came to the conclusion that de Gaulle was at least as concerned for France's postwar future as for the urgent task of winning the war. This may have been hindsight. Then and later, the two men certainly talked at length about what should be done. When Anglo-French union proved impossible, de Gaulle set up his French National Committee in London as the new "legitimate authority of France." Monnet, as he wrote later, would have preferred "a less dramatic attitude and a less personalized form of action": he feared that the London committee, under British protection, might alienate support in metropolitan and overseas France. When at length he decided to leave London for the United States, he received a note from the General. "Our fundamental aim is the same," de Gaulle wrote, "and perhaps together we can do great things."

The chance came again in 1943, when Monnet was in Algiers—officially to advise General Giraud, but in fact to prevent a clash between him and General de Gaulle. On May 30, de Gaulle arrived from London. That night, at his villa, Monnet talked privately with him. "His character," Monnet noted, "had not changed since I had seen him in London in 1940: it was the same mixture of a practical intelligence that could only command respect, and a disquieting tendency to overstep the bounds of common sense. He was by turns intimate, using his undoubted charm, and distant, impervious to argument when carried away by patriotic honor or personal pride. I agreed with his analysis of things, but only up to a point: beyond that point I could no longer follow him in his bursts of egocentricity."

Monnet worked with de Gaulle on the Algiers Committee of National Liberation—"the central authority of France," it claimed; later it became the provisional government. But before long, at his own request, he returned to the United States to secure further supplies for France. After the liberation, he divided his time between America and Paris; and it was in Washington, in August 1945, that he proposed to de Gaulle the idea of a French economic plan. "You speak of greatness," he said, "but today the French are small. There will only be greatness when the French are of a stature to warrant it." He concluded: "Everyone must be associated in an investment and modernization plan." The General agreed. "That is what has to be done," he declared, "and that is the name for it." And it was—although most Frenchmen came to call it the Monnet Plan.

On December 21, 1945, General de Gaulle signed the decree establishing the Planning Commissariat. A month later, he resigned. Never again were he and Monnet to work together. Only once, after the General's return to power in 1958, was there even the hint that they might do so. Monnet described it to me years later, when I asked him how he had felt on hearing that de Gaulle had died. I myself was torn, I said; I couldn't help feeling a certain regret.

Monnet thought for a moment, then said

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reflectively: "Ah, yes, he wasn't a great statesman, but he was a great man. He found France in the abyss; he pulled her out. . . . You know, I made a mistake. I ought to have talked with him, tried to convince him."

"While he was out of office, you mean?"

"Yes. It was a mistake. I might perhaps have been able to convince him. He understood our affairs very well. He got the point." Monnet paused. "But delegating authority—for him, that wasn't possible. For him, France was himself. So, to delegate part of national sovereignty, that wasn't possible; it would have been giving up a part of himself. It wasn't to be done—he couldn't. It would have been giving part of his own flesh."

"As in *The Merchant of Venice*."

"Yes. He couldn't do it. But I ought to have tried. I was wrong."

It was then that Monnet mentioned their later meeting, at an official reception, when de Gaulle was president of France. "I suggested to him how he could become president of the European Republic. He could announce a referendum, get himself elected for two years, and then it could be Adenauer's turn."

"What happened?"

"He asked me to go and see him. I explained the idea. He called in members of his staff. But he didn't do it: he couldn't. Then, at the end, we were alone, and he said to me: 'Would you like a more active life?' He was asking if I'd like to work with him. So I said" —and here Monnet chuckled—" 'You know that I'm interested in only one thing—Europe.' And he said: 'Yes, that's it.' But I didn't do it. Perhaps I should have done. I don't know."

"Do you think it might have worked? You sold him the French Plan. Perhaps you could have sold him Europe."

"Perhaps. But I don't think so."

He was almost certainly right. Knowing Monnet, I could hardly imagine a greater contrast than with the tall, aloof, formal, eloquent, and solitary de Gaulle. One Frenchman who worked for them both at different times declared: "With the General, you feel like the least intelligent of men. With Monnet, your intelligence seems to grow." It did, because he challenged it. For many, de Gaulle was an oracle: Monnet was eager for discussion—with heads of state or doormen, on equal terms. De Gaulle, steeped in history, was skeptical of progress. Monnet, the advocate of change, knew little of the past and detested changes in his own environment; but he had a profound sense of the transformations wrought by time. The very way he pronounced that word in English—"It takes ta-a-ahm"—was a talisman of patience.

De Gaulle, for all his hopeful rhetoric, was surely a pessimist. Near the close of his life, he told André Malraux: "The question is no longer whether France will save Europe, but to understand that the death of Europe threatens the death of France." As they went to the door, the General shook hands and looked up at the first stars emerging in the night. "For me," he said, "they confirm the insignificance of things."

In Monnet's eyes, life was too precious to be insignificant. The world was full of trouble. People were poor, hungry, maltreated; violence threatened peace. One man alone could hardly alter things, nor could one nation. It would take collective effort, and time. The real difficulty was knowing how to begin. And having begun, continue; even setbacks could be helpful, provided that one learned from them. To be discouraged was self-centered and pointless in the face of the facts—"necessity," as Monnet would say. Twice I happened to talk with him after the failure of important ventures. On one occasion I asked: "Are you disappointed?" "I'm never disappointed," he answered—in a disappointed voice. Earlier, when de Gaulle had just blocked Britain's first bid to join the European Community, I remarked: "*C'est déprimant*." Monnet looked up quickly, blinked, and said: "*Non: c'est attristant*"—then went on discussing what to do next.

With America overshadowing the Western world, de Gaulle sought greatness for France in an independent Europe of sovereign nations—*l'Europe des états*. Monnet liked and respected American virtues, and his feelings were returned. He loved France, more deeply than some people realized; but he saw her future best assured in a Europe united enough to be an equal partner of the United States. This made some commentators describe him as a federalist: but he himself was sparing with the term. Like "the United States of Europe," "federalist" was a useful slogan to help a whole generation discard old habits of

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thought; and for a time Monnet certainly believed that Europe could be united under a supranational government. Twenty years later, he privately admitted: "At the beginning, we were wrong." What had emerged in the European Community was what he called "a permanent dialogue" between the national governments and the central common institutions: the Commission, the European Parliament, and the Court. That dialogue, in Monnet's view, was part of a civilizing process whereby nation-states were coming to accept the supremacy of law, as fellow citizens do. It was the fulfillment of his old maxim: "We are not forming coalitions of states, but uniting people." His favorite anthology was Robert Bridges's *Spirit of Man*; and one of his favorite quotations was from the Swiss philosopher Henri-Frédéric Amiel:

> Each person's experience starts again from the beginning. Only institutions grow wiser. They accumulate collective experience; and, because of this experience and wisdom, people who accept common rules find that while their own nature remains unaltered, their behavior is gradually transformed.

From Monnet, such literary allusions were rare. His peasant appearance was not wholly misleading, for he came of solid, prosperous, peasant stock. Born in Cognac, the home of brandy, on the Charente River midway between Angoulême and the Bay of Biscay, he had grown up in that quiet, staid, rather somber town, its walls still blackened by the microscopic fungus which thrives on alcohol fumes. All around lie the vineyards. The brandy-grape area of the Grande Champagne, as Monnet would point out, is no bigger than 250 square miles, yet it grows more than a hundred different varieties of grapes. "Isn't it clear," asked Monnet, "why the French are such individualists?"

Wherever his work took him in later life, Monnet usually sought a home outside the center of town. Even in the miniature city of Luxembourg, when he was president of the European Coal and Steel Community's High Authority, he took a house at Bricherhof overlooking meadows and woods. When he worked in Paris, he lived nearly thirty miles away to the southwest, at Houjarray, in a stone-floored farmhouse with a view across the fields to the forest of Rambouillet. He was alarmed at one time when he heard that Brigitte Bardot planned to buy a house nearby; but it turned out that she too was intent on peace and quiet. Most other neighbors were farmers. One of them owned a field adjoining Monnet's property, making it an awkward shape. Monnet's predecessor had tried to buy the field, but its owner had refused to sell. "So long as I have this bit of land," he said, "I can say '*Merde!*' to anyone." Faced with the same refusal, Monnet bought a better piece of land elsewhere in the village and offered it in exchange. The bargain was struck instantly. Like had dealt with like.

Every morning, wherever he was, Monnet rose at seven, put on sturdy brown boots, a thick pair of trousers, a sweater and scarf, a hat, and an old dun-colored "windcheater," and stumped off on a walk, usually alone. "That's when I work," he explained. Walking with him could be unnerving. He would take one's arm, then stop and turn about, lost in thought. Conversation might become a spasmodic monologue. Others, too, could be disconcerted by Monnet's early-morning habits. Once, at a hotel in London, he went for his walk in the park while the night porter was still on duty. When he came back in his country clothes, the day porter could hardly believe that this humbly dressed figure was one of the hotel's guests.

As a boy, Monnet had briefly wanted to be a boxer. I once asked him why: was it because boxing was a conflict tamed by rules? He was tempted by the plausible answer; but he typically thought it "too intellectual." At school in Cognac, he had disliked academic study, and had never gone to a university. At the age of eighteen, when he went to North America as a salesman for the family brandy firm, his father had advised him: "Don't take any books. No one can do your thinking for you." In Paris, Monnet's room was full of books, many of them donated and inscribed by their authors; but he was no great reader, except of newspapers. Nor, unlike de Gaulle, was Monnet a fluent writer. He scribbled notes continually, in rapid "debased copperplate" handwriting on small pink memo pads; but they tended to peter out in half-sentences linked by dashes. As he once told me, "I can't write, but I know how to correct." He certainly did. One crucial draft I helped to work on with him—a European policy statement eventually adopted

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by the twenty-one political parties and fourteen labor unions of his Action Committee—went through 140 versions. Nor was Monnet a polished public speaker. He described de Gaulle, admiringly, as "*un grand acteur*"; but his own small voice was unsuited to oratory. Its huskiness bothered him: to improve it, he went to such Alpine spas as Challes-les-Eaux. On a platform, he looked flushed and ill-at-ease.

But he always heeded the rest of his father's parting advice: "Look out of the window, talk with people. Pay attention to your neighbor." As a traveling salesman in tough, remote frontier towns, Monnet acquired Anglo-American affability. Speaking French, he was often hard, cool, and aloof. When he switched to English, with a faint American accent, his personality seemed to change: he would grin and chuckle, become one of the boys. "*Nous ne sommes pas des enfants de choeur*," he was fond of saying—roughly, we're no angels; and in British or American company he could sound piratical and racy. In Washington during World War II, he confessed, he read crime novels by Peter Cheyney, and borrowed a saying from their hero Lemmy Caution: "Whenever I don't know what to do, I get into trouble." There was even a hint of fascination in the way he spoke of Ivar Kreuger, the finally fraudulent Swedish "match king." I was hardly surprised when a British diplomat, in private, called Monnet "an adventurer." Another thought he looked like "a mixture of gangster and conspirator."

Monnet's scapegrace nature emerged in stray remarks. Invited to preface a friend's book, he asked a colleague to prepare a draft. "Nothing could give me greater pleasure," it began. "Nonsense!" said Monnet. "I can think of forty things." One spring day in 1973, the Action Committee was meeting in the Berlaymont, the steel, glass, and concrete headquarters of the European Community's executive arm. As I guided Monnet through the labyrinth, I gestured at the rows of offices and the functionaries hurrying to and fro. "Isn't it odd to think that all this was once just a piece of paper on your desk?" Monnet's eyebrows rose. "Yes, it's extraordinary." Then, with a smile: "It's appalling." In his crowded Paris office, on another day, he found me ankle-deep in books, papers, and box files: the contents of a cupboard had collapsed. I pulled a face at the mess, but Monnet grinned. "Nothing ever gets done except in disorder," he said.

He was only partly joking. Order could mean habit or tradition. Fresh thought would often start in perplexity—trying out countless approaches to the same crux. Monnet's intentness was infectious. When he embarked on any venture, it was because he saw it as the most urgent task in the world. It might involve great labor, long argument and investigation, regardless of the time of day. Sometimes, it meant working all night. Accordingly, when Monnet was due to catch a plane, his secretaries took the precaution of booking him on several alternative flights, often in the names of colleagues or friends. A reporter who had known him as a young man at the League of Nations—"short, quick, mysterious, with great charm and a sparkle in his brown eyes"—noted how even then he ignored office hours and administrative routine. Dossiers piled up on his desk unread: he preferred to talk with his informants, assessing them, weighing their words, checking one against another, plying them with questions which more bookish people would have called Socratic.

It was a banker's method. Monnet lived frugally. With any meal, he took no more than a small glass of wine. As he grew older, he gave up smoking and barely touched even brandy. "If I were condemned to death," he once told me, "I'd ask for *this* as my last meal." "This" was a plate of cold canned sardines, with butter, French bread, and *haricots verts*. Yet, despite his simple tastes, Monnet was also at home in the world of first-class travel and chauffeur-driven limousines. For official occasions, he wore dapper dark-blue suits made for him by his London tailors. At luncheon in his Avenue Foch office, his own chauffeur served as footman. On visits to London, he enjoyed roast beef and the solid, mahogany-and-leather atmosphere of old-world hotels and restaurants. On the way to Simpson's-in-the-Strand one evening in a rather slow taxicab, he looked through the window at the razzle-dazzle near Piccadilly Circus, all fast food and one-arm bandits. "*C'est horrible, tout ça!*" he exclaimed, with distaste and nostalgia in his voice.

Monnet's years as a merchant banker had marked him in other ways too. Many of his

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closest friends came from the same profession. English banking terms like "swap arrangement," "bond issue," or "line of credit" might suddenly crop up when he was speaking French. And at crucial moments he would demand "a balance sheet." How many aircraft could the Allies muster in World War II, compared with the enemy? At the time, astonishingly, no one knew. When the facts were assembled, the need for action was clear.

Most of all, Monnet had a banker's flair and discretion. He inspired confidence, and knew in whom to place it. People in all walks of life, including such statesmen as John F. Kennedy, would consult Monnet as they might a banker or lawyer who was also a family friend. "I don't know why," he said, with not quite genuine bewilderment: "I always say the same thing." But they knew that secrets would be safe with him; that he would leave them to take the decision and the credit; and that any advice he gave would be honest and worth considering—even if they finally rejected it. He was not always right or successful, as he freely admitted. One example was his suggestion to Lyndon Johnson that Israel and her Arab neighbors be encouraged to work together on desalinated water supplies—a variant of the Schuman Plan for the Middle East. The United States never took up the idea; but, as Monnet pointed out, "Unless you try, you'll never know if you might after all have succeeded."

Persistence was a quality Monnet had inherited and learned. The maturing of brandy took constant patient attention. So did international understanding. Monnet used to smile when recalling that his maternal grandmother had been known in the family as "Marie la Rabâcheuse"—Monotonous Mary. "I think she had only a few simple ideas," he said, "and to those she held fast." He remembered her example when he was in China, confronting a wall of polite delay. An old friend advised him: "Don't try to understand the Chinese; you never will. Just stick to what you want, and make your actions conform to your words." Monnet heeded the advice—so well that Chiang Kai-shek detected "something Chinese" about him. "Don't waste your time speculating about what other people 'really think,'" he insisted. "Look at what they do. Decide on your own objective, then think out how to reach it."

On Monnet's desk, tucked into the corner of a photograph of his daughter, was a bent picture postcard of the primitive *Kon-Tiki* raft, on which Thor Heyerdahl and his companions had crossed the Atlantic. In 1954, when Monnet's plan for a European army was facing a crisis, he took a whole day off to spend with Heyerdahl. "Those young men," he said, "chose their course, and then they set out. They knew that they could not turn back. Whatever the difficulties, they had only one option—to go on."

To the end of his life Monnet went on, pursuing the goal of international peace. He was not always solemn about it. One day in London, we were lunching at his favorite hotel. He had just succeeded in another effort of persuasion, this time involving the prime ministers of Britain and France. He was pleased and expansive. "You know," he said, "the world we live in is very complex. We can't solve problems by tackling them head-on. We have to change their context. We have to find the point where a change can be made—a change that will go on by itself and change other things too. Once we find that essential point, everything else follows. It's difficult." He laughed. "That's why we worked for six months on this business. When I showed it to our friend in London, he said: 'All great ideas are simple.' That paper we had the other day—it was good: it went into all the details. But it wasn't convincing. To convince, you have to be simple. It's easy to have ideas. What's difficult is to get people to act on them."

A waiter appeared. "Would you care for a sweet, Sir?" "Just a coffee," we both said. "Decaffeinated," Monnet added. Another waiter brought a trolley full of trifles, *gâteaux*, fruit salad, and *crème caramel*. "I'm tempted," I said. "So am I," said Monnet. "When you see them, it's different."

Three other memories remain. At Monnet's eightieth birthday party, friends from many countries gathered at Houjarray. I looked across the table at Monnet, sitting with Etienne Hirsch, his assistant and successor on the French Plan, and later president of Euratom. Different as they were—Hirsch the Jewish engineer, Monnet the Charentais entrepreneur—the two of them nonetheless looked like cousins: both short and compact, no longer young, both with clear bright eyes,

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both smiling. Hirsch raised his glass and stood up. "To Jean," he said. "Without him, some of us might not be alive."

Monnet's last political act was to publish his memoirs. At his request, I translated them. As I wrote, I could hear his voice in my head, virtually dictating the text. He was pleased with the outcome: Madame Monnet thought it "more like Jean than the original." He asked me to go and see him, in the familiar farmhouse sitting-room, surrounded by his wife's paintings. It was a quarter of a century since his first book, *Les Etats-unis d'Europe ont commencé*, had helped persuade me to join his cause. Now Monnet was frail, and could no longer read; but he talked as in the past. We both knew that we were saying good-bye. As I rose to leave, he took my hand in both of his—and then amazed me. "*Je vous donne ma bénédiction*," he said.

Not long afterward, on March 20, 1979, Monnet's family and friends gathered once more, in a small country churchyard near his home. They came from at least two continents. The Federal German chancellor had attended the funeral service; so had the president of France. At first, the hymns and prayers had seemed incongruous, as if the Church were claiming Monnet for its own. His sister worked for the Catholic hierarchy, and he had greatly admired Pope John; but, with colleagues at least, he had seldom spoken of God, or death, or eternity. Yet, on reflection, there was justice in the claim. What had been Monnet's secret? His wisdom? His patience? His great intelligence? His persuasive skill? Underlying them all, it seems to me, was something simpler and more mysterious: moral and spiritual strength. In the end, it was Monnet's goodness that made him unique.

An Aerial Photograph

THOMAS CARPER

He marvels at the regularity
Of fields, of fruit trees planted in long rows,
Of vines and hedges laid out mindfully.
The earthscape is an image of repose.
The roads are purposeful, going to town
Directly, bending only along the edge
Of too-high hills or, where the streams run down
The valley, organizing toward a bridge.
He thinks, "I have been there." When he was there,
He had been often lost. A patchwork land,
Odd curves in roads had kept him unaware
Of what, now, anyone could understand,
Looking at the aerial photograph
That shows no person on a human path.

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Ty Cobb

The Hero and His Warts

ROBERT B. HEILMAN

TY COBB. *By Charles C. Alexander. Oxford University Press. $16.95.*

My grandmother lived on Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, a block or two from Lehigh Street, on which stood both Shibe Park, the home of Connie Mack's Athletics, and the Phillies' park—one about fifteen, the other about twenty blocks from our away-from-home family base. Between 1918 and the mid-1920s we periodically hiked to games at both parks ("we" could be any combination of the family baseball fans—Father, two sons, and a daughter). There was a two-track trolley line on Lehigh, but we didn't spend money on carfare unless distances were unarguably unwalkable. Youngsters hiking on city streets had few fears then. We conned the schedules for doubleheaders: some four hours of ball (since play was faster then than now) for twenty-five or fifty cents in the bleachers or the "pavilion" (out beyond first or third) at Shibe Park. The Phils were weak during our juvenile fanhood, and bleacher irony was lively. Without knowing the word, we were charmed by the thing. An error-prone left fielder catches a fly that comes straight to him and is cheered with "Drop it," "That wasn't your ball," and "Don't run so fast, you might hurt yourself." A visiting pitcher, judged the undeserving beneficiary of an umpire's call, lets fly a wild pitch, and the bleachers, as if directed by a cheerleader, cut loose with a solid rhythmical "Stuh-rike two." On the other hand there was the thrill of hearing, at least once, the umpire, who was the public-address system of the day, announce the famous battery, then a little long in the tooth, "Alexander and Killefer." And even in early years we could respond to Bill Klem's controlling a ball game with royal power.

Though also weak, the A's were acquiring the players that would make the great Connie Mack teams of the late twenties—Grove, Foxx, Cochrane, Simmons, et al., most of whom we saw at one time or another. We always hoped to see play a boy whom we knew, a kind of member of Father's church; however, he did not make it with the A's, and he liked to think that his not being a Catholic hurt him in the McGillicuddy fold. We had to read about some later thrills, for instance, Mack's brilliant tactic of starting Howard Ehmke, a retread without current glory, in the first game of the 1929 Series against the Cubs. (Getting a later game in the Series via loudspeaker and a diamond-shaped bulletin board in downtown Athens, Ohio, I left in disgust when the A's were down 0 to 8 in about the seventh. So I missed their 10-run next inning—one of the great World Series comebacks, started or aided when Hack Wilson in center lost a fly in the sun.) On the whole, Shibe Park seemed meant for effort rather than irony. But one day when the Yanks were in town and Babe Ruth fielded with a recurrent shortfall of earnestness, a Philadelphia sportswriter cracked us up with his comment: "The Babe was nearly killed by a fly which fell beside him as he stood there thinking." And then there was the occasional funny business—farcical mimings of umps and players, prestidigitations with the ball—by the one-

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time White Sox pitcher who was now a Washington coach, Nick Altrock.

Come August, Detroit and Washington always seemed to be vying for fifth place, even though the Detroit outfield regularly had batting averages hardly credible today, with two of the men repeatedly over .400. Hence a Detroit game was a great experience. It was something to see Cobb, Veach, and Heilmann in the flesh (and to intimate, to any fans who would listen to kids, that we had, if not actually a cousin, well, at least a nominal connection out there). It seemed not quite right to join in the boos as Cobb held up the game, when he was player-manager, by his long walks in from center field for conferences at the mound. For the scene was still permeated by a sense of the heroic as actual or potential presence.

A good deal of that heroic remains in Charles C. Alexander's new biography of Cobb. It could hardly fail to do so, for the main facts are, to use an overused word, epical: Cobb's unrelenting warlike spirit, the extraordinary length of his career (he played for twenty-four years, six as player-manager), his infliction of damage on others and his survival of the injuries to which he was prone, his incredible batting averages, his records in numbers of hits, extra-base hits, runs batted in, runs scored, stolen bases. These records, which held up much longer than such records usually do, got Cobb, by an almost unanimous vote, hardly equaled since, into the Hall of Fame on the first go-round. The Cobb heroic lies in the sheer facts, not in the heroicizing imagination of the biographer. Alexander sticks to the record, turning out neither a campaign biography nor a get-rich-quick, now-it-can-be-told muckraking job. Naturally he does not shirk the muck, or, to get out of the barnyard and into the salon, he follows Cromwell's direction to his portrait painter, Sir Peter Lely, "Remark all these roughnesses, pimples, warts, and everything as you see me." But he does not let eczema and psoriasis steal the show.

Alexander is the professional historian who takes a firm stance on what happened, not on what it meant, or on what it could or should have been, or on speculations about the motives and makeup of the man who made the happenings. His subject is the baseball player rather than the man: the treatment of Cobb after retirement (thirty-three years out of seventy-five) occupies only an eighth of the book. The method is annalistic rather than topical; rarely is there a subordination of chronology to a follow-through of a theme. Yet the year-by-year (or month-by-month or even, at times, day-by-day) narrative is never tedious. There is always the tension of the campaigns, and often the events arrange themselves in a partly fictional way, with apparent failure giving way to success (or vice versa), or unclear clues to unambiguous denouements, or doldrums to crises and climaxes, or stresses to meaningful anticlimaxes. Finally, Alexander's style hits a pleasant middle ground between the academic extreme, in-house and overweight, and the sports-journalism mode, clichéd, populist, and belting out truth with irremediable candor. It is the civilized colloquial. Incidentally, it takes for granted the reader's grip on standard baseball idiom. A virgin in diamond jive would find some passages as mysterious as phrases in any foreign language are to most bachelors of arts.

Alexander doubtless had sound reasons for excluding various matters from his book—perhaps a lack of solid historical evidence (his documentation is excellent), perhaps fear of bulk in a volume already quite substantial. When he says, "It was as a baseball player that the public knew him and that he knew himself," he might have added, "and that this book knows him." But Cobb was also a son, a husband, a father, a citizen, an associate of diverse people outside of baseball, and one is very curious about him in these roles, about his relationships with others, and about some of those others. One wants to know more about Cobb's mother, who, in a small southern town three-quarters of a century ago, took a lover and then, in circumstances that permitted a legally accepted defense of self-protection against an intruder, shot and killed her husband, a leading school official and prominent citizen. One wants to know more about the personalities of Cobb's two wives, both of whom, after one or more efforts, succeeded in divorcing him. We get some sense of the makeup of Ty, Jr., but learn little about the other children, with whom Cobb was rarely on good terms. We would like a little more of the "feel" of certain public events—World War I, the Black Sox scandal, the dictatorship of Judge Landis, Prohibition,

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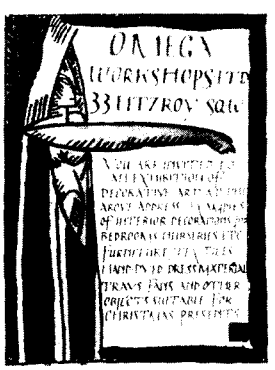

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the twenties' boom—that impinged, as does private life, on the work of hitting, running, and fielding. Still, to acknowledge these wishes is perhaps only to say that in Cobb's life and era there are the materials for several kinds of book. One kind, indeed, would be fiction. The Cobb story would hardly be the thing for Mark Harris or Bernard Malamud, for the facts do too much of the writing. What the story needs is the kind of novelist who would translate the essential matters into a more inclusive idiom—say the Robert Penn Warren of *All the King's Men*.

Granted, Cobb's life had no real political dimension. But the life somehow persists in implying that it is representative, and one keeps looking at the problem. Alexander instinctively forgoes interpretation, overtly rejecting, happily, the psychoanalytical, which has not "greatly advanced our knowledge of people we can know only historically and therefore only fragmentarily." So we are spared the endemic oedipalities and kindred banalities. But Cobb has a way of tempting one into banalities: he puts a foot into several familiar myths. If we take him in later years, he exactly represents the Now In My Day archetype. He was a complete lapsarian: the players of his day were far superior to even their big-name successors, and the new game —Ruth was the demonic corrupter of Eden —was the world's best illustration of the Fall. Cobb called his game "scientific," a misnomer for a style that preferred boxing to slugging, finesse to power (the steady, placed hits against the occasional homer and the attendant strikeouts), that valued primarily calculation, outguessing the opponent, the planned unexpected, the subtle intimidation (alertness to flappability on the other side) as much as the overt threat (though Cobb was a spikes-up slider, and when he was manager, he often ordered the dustoff or brushback). As a southerner, Cobb was perhaps a natural for another myth: the Hero of the Failed Cause. In his twenty-one full seasons with Detroit, the Tigers were in only three World Series, won none, and took only four series games out of sixteen. One genius can effect a group triumph, apparently, only if the group is somewhere near triumph without the genius. But we should not mistake Cobb for a Lee or a Hector (though, in the twisted modern meaning, he did a lot of hectoring).

Yes, of course, there is the banality of the Horatio Alger myth. In origin, Cobb was middle-class rather than other-side-of-the-tracks or genteel poor, but he was as hungry as if he had had a hunger problem, and his "success" in worldly terms was enormous. He was a tough salary bargainer in days when ten thousand dollars was a vast sum, and for years he was one of the highest-paid players in the game; he got more money by playing with many teams in the off-season; he was a paid actor; he got a quick start in the commercials and endorsements operation; he took the ghost route into sports journalism; he bought into Coca Cola and General Motors early and eventually held many shares in both; he got many stock-market tips and developed a sharp market sense; he had money in various successful local businesses here and there; he became a millionaire with the kind of holdings that brought him through the 1929 crash with losses far short of disaster; and of course he went the route of conspicuous consumption—cars and houses. He aided the unfortunate, financed a hospital, fought with taxing authorities, starred at testimonial dinners (even one put on by B'nai B'rith, white racist though he was), gambled at Reno, golfed with the great, hunted with heroes of politics and finance, raced cars, graduated from teetotaling to toping. He incarnated a thousand entries in *Who's Who* and a thousand Sunday-paper tales of men who made good (and themselves) by making and marketing goods.

The ghostly paradigm of things upon which played this spume of worldly glory—this visible nature (or lusus naturae)—was of course the idea of the sports hero. That idea is the great sine qua non of the Cobb history. Have we, then, a Frank Merriwell in the flesh? This additional banality is not without its uses. For Merriwell, Cobb was not. True, Frank once pulled a corny Cobbish trick by seeming, in a crisis, to bend over to tie a shoelace and then suddenly slipping a vital third strike past the bemused batter. But Frank was essentially the good guy, while Cobb was fitted for the black hat early in life. He was an uneasy, suspicious teammate, inconsiderate, censorious, quarrelsome, and often inclined to turn genius into exhibitionism; he had a sense of privilege that annoyed or even enraged his teammates (he seemed to be a manager's pet; he disdained training camps and joined the team only when

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he felt like it); he brawled with umpires, opposing players, and even fans. As manager he was unsympathetic, overbearing, tactless, and even abusive (though in managership he lasted ten times as long as a later base-stealing star, Maury Wills). He detested blacks and got into rows with them; he quarreled over bills, even small ones, and fought with waitresses, cashiers, and storekeepers; his California mansion was dark for a long time because he refused to pay a bill that he thought too large; he was on the outs with wives and children.

Although he learned in time to exhibit a sort of charm on public occasions and with bigwigs, Cobb remained essentially a difficult, dark-souled, unlovely person. He was a forebear of Billy Martin, Nastase, McEnroe, and a growing number of sports figures in whom great talent is combined with incivility, boorishness, public contentiousness, and tantrums, all versions of egotism untainted by two main elements of maturity—sense of reality and awareness of others' sensibilities. (And lest this list seem sexist, we might note Navratilova's unlovable tendency to voice her own virtues, and Mrs. King's public lament over the million or more her lesbian affair cost her.) If Ty does not have all the thousand faces attributed to the hero, he has enough of them to stir curiosity and speculation.

The mixture of elements in Cobb suggests another myth that has less status as a banality—that of Achilles, the premier gifted warrior, a foul-tempered hero, sulky egotist, motivated to public effort only by desire for personal revenge, and barbarous in triumph. Or, with a different emphasis, that of Philoctetes, invaluable in war because his bow and arrow have magical power, but intolerable to fellow Greeks because his infected foot stinks and causes such spasms of pain that he screams unbearably (the star at once noisome and noisy). Forty years ago Edmund Wilson interpreted Philoctetes and his bow as the artist with mysterious gifts, and his wound as the psychic disturbance that is often an accompaniment of genius ("Great wits are sure to madness near allied"; and later, Auden would interpret deviations from citizenly norms as protectors of talent). These myths describe rather than analyze: they accept a tie between the heroic skill and the unpleasant demeanor or ugly face. You don't get one without the other, at least most of the time. One current way of describing the shortcoming of the Ty kind of hero is this: he lacks "style," or, in the more popular idiom, "class." These words imply decency, grace, understatement (no epic boasts), a relaxed giving up of an expectable assertiveness or censoriousness.

If we sum up such manners by the word "magnanimity," we have a key: magnanimity is incompatible with the competitive spirit as we currently understand it (and as Homeric Greeks evidently understood it). This incompatibility has been voiced by more than one sports figure: Ohio State once had a football coach known as "Show No Mercy" Schmidt, and Woody Hayes seems to have been his spiritual heir; many coaches lament that their teams lack the "killer instinct"; and everyone knows Durocher's apothegm, "Nice guys finish last." The quest of triumph reduces courtesy to vulnerability. The competitive spirit—that is, to be underpriviledged in magnanimity—cannot distinguish large and small things, relevant and irrelevant. The person possessed by it does not know when to be heroically combative and when civilized; *selbst über alles* is always the scenario, whatever the scene. This Greek-cum-modern temperament is uniquely modern in another way: it is a product of a spirit that we talk about addictively: "individualism." To be wholly an individual, while it may be to be a genius, is also to escape from all the limits on self that make us bearable to each other. Individualism makes not only the vital innovator, but the churlish oaf and the spoiled brat, and even worse. Odd that this overripe fruit of romanticism should contribute to a human phenomenon that gives us a tie with pre-Attic Greece.

When we talk about "style" and "class," we are no longer on the wavelength of uninhibited individualism, for these ideas depend on a social sense. Their life is a traditional one; it filters down to us from the most complete imaging of the ideal in the literature of chivalry. Now this was romantic too; it gave us the word *romance*. But in portraying the romantic hero, it proposed, not a narrow program of self-indulgence, but a large demanding ideal: it conceived of the union of competitiveness and magnanimity, of the committed warrior and the well-behaved man, of the gifted individual and the social sense. Nor did this mean an "unrealistic" view of the human

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scene. For while chivalric temperament gave us Chaucer's knight and Gawain and the Green Knight, its literature could also imagine Modred and a final destruction more complete than that of the Trojan War. So, we can give some credit to its portrait of the hero as civilized man, and, through this, a definition of human possibility that, even in the bleachers and press box, survives or rises again as "class."

Ty was more Homeric than Arthurian. As a hero, he got enormous applause, indeed mass adulation. But he got boos, too (and perhaps thrived on crowd hostility), and any number of players and associates and observers couldn't stand him. They were resisting, as most of us at times would like to do, the implication of the Achilles and Philoctetes myths, that geniuses may have unpalatable accompaniments, and that the rest of us, if we are to accept or keep company with or profit from genius, may have to put up with a lot more than we like. (Presumably a sturdy putter-up would have been the scholar Leo Spitzer, whom I once heard register incredulity that a fellow professor had said, "Thank God my children are not geniuses.") The duality of giftedness may be built-in, or it may be encouraged or even brought into being by a society inordinately committed to successful competitiveness and unfettered individualism (the dual hero *et nascitur et fit*, to revise Horace). But if society is the creator of the duality, it does not generally like its creation. Here I am not reiterating that people dislike the unpalatable accompaniments of genius. I mean rather that people dislike the combination of the heroic and the disagreeable. They would prefer the singular person to be single, and thus to simplify responses. They would like heroic greatness to mean infallible excellence, to provide a fail-safe catharsis of the impulse to impose unconditional surrender on the world, and during and after the game to afford no opportunity for boos. Boos are vocalized disappointment with actuality.

And yet. And yet the society that would have its heroes single-textured has its own duality. We respond in ways other than just feeling the thrill of vicarious triumph through the hero. For one thing, his failures, whether on the field or anywhere else, provide comforting play for our general cantankerousness of nature and for the specific pleasure of indignation, which then can seem not self-indulgence but honest criticalness by men of principle. In a more general way, we respond inconsistently because of our own dividedness—a national trait? a contemporary one? a human one?—between idolatry and skepticism. We are equally prone to self-forgetfulness in worship, and self-protectiveness through doubts of heroic authenticity. Besides, our responses are formed by a second great dividedness—that between admiration of the hero and love of the underdog. Most of us are underdogs, and underdoggism, which lets us feel a special sort of triumph, requires the downfall of the accepted hero, the bookies' pet. Finally, underdoggism may function in a much more subtle way: the imperfections of the epic star mitigate the possible discomfort of comparisons that might be imposed by a greater degree of flawlessness in him. Perhaps not more than half our nature wishes the hero immaculate.

Such reflections flow naturally from reading Alexander's excellent biography, which, quite ample in scope but free from fat or sag, avoids the easy vocabularies of puffery, debunking, and quasi-clinical savvy and, minimizing speculation, lets the story of events form the portrait of a relentless competitor who was not often a nice guy and hardly ever finished last, and whose curriculum vitae makes us seek out its more than individual significance.

The Colossus Laid Out

BERNARD SHAW: A BIBLIOGRAPHY. *Edited by Dan H. Laurence. Oxford University Press. 2 volumes. $155 the set.*

Reviewed by JACQUES BARZUN

This repertory of Shaw's published and unpublished work is probably unique in the history of bibliography: it can be read for pleasure. Moreover, it gives knowledge and not merely information for impatient consulters. The pleasure and knowledge come from

JACQUES BARZUN, the distinguished historian, is the author of, among other books, *A Stroll with William James*, *A Catalogue of Crime*, *The House of Intellect*, and *Darwin, Marx, and Wagner: Critique of a Heritage*.

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the discovery of many incidents in Shaw's life that a relentless and inspired search of thirty years for all conceivable items was bound to disclose.

Dan Laurence has seen to it that we hear these new details agreeably, in his lucid prose and often in Shaw's. All Shaw's statements of twenty-five words or less are reproduced in full and every work is shown in its various avatars. It is delightful to learn, for example, that the mighty essay *The Sanity of Art*, which attacked Max Nordau's best-seller *Degeneration*, first appeared in a New York magazine as "A Degenerate's View of Nordau." In effect, the *Bibliography* resembles an exhibition catalogue. I cannot think of a comparable piece of work to match it in minute thoroughness, inherent difficulty, and intrinsic interest.

The more than one thousand pages cover the books and pamphlets, naturally, plus: rehearsal copies of the plays; works edited or contributed to by Shaw; letters and articles in the press (nearly four thousand of them); blurbs for friends' or enemies' books; broadcasts; recordings; manuscripts; works on Shaw; misattributions; ghost-books and essays; and also the famous printed postcards (in thirty courteous versions) with which Shaw tried to hold off the flood of unsolicited correspondence—and repelled it about as successfully as Mrs. Partington did the ocean with her mop.

This bibliography also resembles the North Pole. Six previous attempts to compile it were made, with Shaw's fitful and useless help, between 1905 and 1936. The last of the explorers was a German refugee whom Shaw befriended, housed, and paid, and who managed to do very little but filch documents from Shaw's unorganized files and scatter them by sale after Shaw's death. It was at a meeting of the Shaw Society in 1952 that, hearing this sad ineffectual announce his abandonment of the bibliography, Dan Laurence, a young American graduate student, made the counter announcement that *he* would take up the task.

By browsing through this great inventory, one is reminded of Shaw's generous and loyal and also unlucky choice of coadjutors: The half-dozen bibliographers collapsed; Archibald Henderson was a wretched biographer; Gabriel Pascal, the film adapter, proved ungrateful; Blanche Patch, the secretary, wrote disagreeable memoirs, and so did the Winsten neighbors at Ayot St. Lawrence. As for the Hamon couple in France, their persistent ineptitude as translators is typified by the title *La charrette aux pommes*, which they bestowed on *The Apple Cart*, evidently not knowing that the allusion of the English to *upsetting* should have been rendered by *Le pot de fleurs*. Yet Shaw defended them in print.

It is obviously Dan Laurence who should have received the master's trust and blessing, but when he began, Shaw had been dead two years, and since the venture took three decades, Shaw would have had to live to the age of 127 before enjoying its result. And had he thus Methuselah'd, he would inevitably have continued writing plays and prefaces and polemics, and the bibliography could never have been finished—a Tristram Shandy situation.

A further advantage of working post-mortem on the finite remains of a giant producer is that it enabled Dan Laurence to enlist the aid of a great many people and tap sources who might not have been so cooperative while the old sage was alive: seven full pages of the acknowledgment section consist of nothing but names of persons and institutions. The fact corresponds of course to the staggering range of Shaw's interests, which he served for three-quarters of a century with buoyant spirit and, as Chesterton said long ago, with unsurpassed magnanimity. The fresh details in the *Bibliography* and the reminder of old ones demonstrate again that the best way to be truly civilized and full of *caritas* as Shaw was is to have a fair and calm opinion of oneself and to vent one's disapprovals fiercely, but in the tone and manner of candid discussion. Shaw is always stating "the case for" some view of the facts, showing that there is, or may be, a case against—and if so, let us hear it.

What is humbling to those of us who scribble is the patience, the indefatigable drive of the man in his effort to attain what he called "exhaustive literary expression." He could not let his own text (or anybody else's) alone; he must revise, amplify, shorten, strengthen. Besides his signed work, he wrote hundreds of thousands of words in others' books; that is, he was an editor on the grand scale, serving the reputation, the cause, or the pocketbook of the other person. In the early 1900s a woman admirer compiled a "Bernard Shaw Calen-

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dar" signalizing each day with a Shavian remark. But the choice was so foolish "or timid," said Shaw (e.g., "Shakespear may have been a poacher"), that "when she sent me the proofs and intimated that she would be ruined if I turned the compilation down, I had to invent on the spot a pack of bogus quotations and improvised aphorisms which will be the despair of my German commentators 300 years hence."

Such is the kind of nugget one happily comes upon in Dan Laurence's gold mine. When one remembers that while preparing it for our delectation he has also edited two volumes of Shaw's letters (a third is on the way) and brought out *Shaw's Music* (i.e., the reviews complete in three volumes), one's gratitude for these labors outstrips all the ready measures of expression. In the *Bibliography* the index is in itself a sizable work of intellect. Perhaps somebody can spot a misprint somewhere, to show that the volumes are also the work of fallible man. All I can find to quarrel with among the frequent and judicious comments on facts is the description of Mrs. Belloc Lowndes's reputation as "fleeting." With the advent of respectability for the crime fiction genre, her "Jack the Ripper" novel *The Lodger* has been acknowledged a classic and three or four of her other tales recognized as deserving a place in the literature.

But we must end with Shaw. How does this indirect review of his writings leave him? My estimate is: greater than ever. It makes no difference whether one agrees with his opinions, whether one prefers *Heartbreak House* to *St. Joan*, whether one understands or not the reasons and the facets of the public character he assumed—artist, critic, esthete, historian, gadfly, ombudsman, rebel, social theorist, political commentator, religious writer—he remains the only model we have of what the citizen of a democracy should be: an informed participant in all the things we deem important to society and the individual.

Seeing him in that light, one thinks of a comparison that, so far as I know, has never been made. Shaw is to the turn of the nineteenth century what Swift was to the turn of the seventeenth. The same abundance of feeling-thought, the same imagination, the same unbounded public spirit, the same capacity to teach unforgettably, the same mastery of prose—a story-telling prose, no matter what the subject. To be sure, the Swift I am thinking of is not widely known—*Gulliver* is valued through hearsay and *A Modest Proposal is regularly misrepresented. The pamphlets and poems are terra incognita. Fortunately for Shaw, the stage is a perennial reviver, and though only the best readers will in future go back to the essays and reviews, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *Man and Superman*, *Candida*, *Pygmalion*, *Major Barbara*, *Misalliance*, and the two others just cited will bring back to Shaw's living shrine generations whose minds will have been shaped by what he thought and said in other forms of art.

Herself

THE COLLECTED STORIES OF COLETTE. *Edited and introduced by Robert Phelps. Translated by Matthew Ward, Antonia White, Anne-Marie Callimachi, and others. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $19.95.*

Reviewed by DONNA RIFKIND

"I want to tell, tell, tell everything I know, all my thoughts, all my surmises," Colette wrote in her little fable, "The Tendrils of the Vine." That impulse is clear throughout this large new collection of stories; Colette is eager to present us not just with a world, but with *her* world, her voice, her experience. In each of these sketches, whether or not she appears directly as a character, Colette's presence dominates the scene; and as she narrates she expresses her intention to propel herself into the action and to own it. Although not exclusively autobiographical, the stories read like specifically located fragments of recollection whose author has missed no detail in the act of remembering.

Most of the facts of Colette's life are by now well known, and again this is to a large extent because of her eagerness to tell us everything she knows. She became an international celebrity before her death and something of a French institution after it, but it was primarily Colette, rather than her admirers, who made

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her own image into a publicly recognized fact; certainly, no one wrote as exhaustively about her life as Colette herself did. Her first "Claudine" novels are transposed journals of her schoolgirl days in Burgundy. *La Vagabonde* (1911) and *L'Envers du music-hall* (1913) chronicle Colette's life as a pantomime artist after her separation from her first husband, Henri Gauthier-Villars (the famous "Willy"). Her later work as a journalist for *Le Matin* is less strictly objective reportage than a personal record of Colette's activities in the years before and after World War I.

It is the more subtle ways in which Colette projects her life onto her work, however, that make both her personality and her writing interesting. Always impulsive, always intimate, Colette's fiction blurs the boundaries between memoir, journalism, dramatic dialogue, and standard fictional techniques in order to concentrate on what she considered more important: the workings of the female mind. Colette's women are all as engaging as their keenly observant creator, and as eager to display their sophistication in matters of fashion and gossip, beauty and sexuality. "When you've been all around the world, you'll think like me," a pantomime artist declares in "The Circus Horse." "Over and above that, there are nasty people everywhere, so one has to learn to keep one's distance; and one can count oneself lucky when one comes into contact, like today, with people who are good company and have class."

Every story in this collection contains a character who knows what Colette knows, who is indeed some aspect of Colette herself, delivering large and confident insights, most of which carry a similar tone and subject matter:

> There is hardly a woman who feels threatened by her age who does not know, after a period of trial and error, how first to try on, then how to give her face a characteristic look, a style which will defy the work of time for ten, fifteen years. ("Alix's Refusal")

> For even if she is fond of her, a woman always judges another woman harshly. ("The Kepi")

> Isn't a woman entirely in what she doesn't say? . . . for a woman forgives a man—even a reporter—everything but insight. ("An Interview")

After imposing such rigid specifications for character types upon her women, Colette goes on to endow them with a rich, spontaneous variety of details. She elaborately describes brilliant costumes, showing how they disguise women who are plain or aging, "combative and desperate." Friends in the stories offer long, excessive compliments to one another, but each takes "pitying and ironic pleasure" in silently calculating the other's imperfections. With all of these details heaped on so little surface, we can begin to feel rather like the women wearing these costumes, confined and a little breathless.

Colette also uses stagecraft in her fiction, designing her stories so that each achieves an elegantly planned mood. No matter how various the situations, we always detect the mind creating them: the clairvoyant again looms larger than the vision she has summoned. Colette is quite aware of this fact and uses it to her advantage, making her characters' most thoughtless gestures seem deliberate, thereby displaying her own control over the scene. In "The Kepi," which describes an older woman as "all too tiresomely like every woman in love," Colette shows us how familiar she is with this kind of woman and how monotonous her love affair seems to her now. Even vehemence is boring for Colette, who, writing about the woman's impassioned young lover, remarks that "impetuosity has its own particular ritual."

This habit of highlighting her authority over her characters comes dangerously close to ruining our pleasure in them. If we read too many of these stories at a sitting, each can become "all too tiresomely" like every other, despite the variations of setting and detail. It is of course difficult to write wearily without wearying one's readers, but, fortunately, Colette's failure to remain altogether dominant over her characters saves us from giving up in exhaustion. André Gide, noting that Colette, "despite all her superiority," seems to have been tainted by her milieu, points to this same tension in Colette between wishing to remain superior to her situation and wishing to be included as a part of it.

All the poignancy of these stories comes from this condition of feeling simultaneously outside and inside a predicament. "I belong to a country which I have left," Colette writes in "Gray Days," and because she is still attached to this country (which represents both her first home in Burgundy and her aban-

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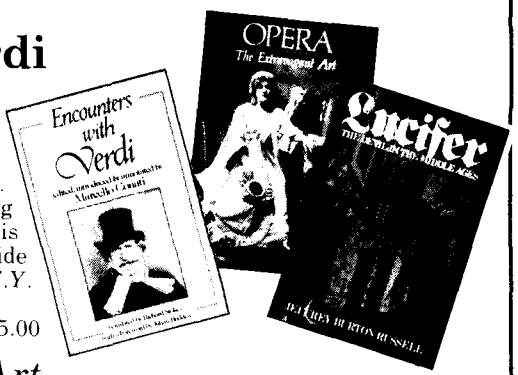

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doned state of childhood innocence), she is still vulnerable to the loss she feels in leaving it. Outside the country where Colette belongs, all desire is unrequited and is therefore certain to result in pain; yet neither she nor her characters can shake free from that desire. Love keeps leaving and returning to the people in Colette's world and is as familiar a burden as their poverty or their ennui. "I don't believe I'd know what to do with myself if I didn't have my sorrow," a young actress says in "Gitanette." "It keeps me company." Colette here is no longer cool or detached; she shares completely in the woman's sorrow—keeping Gitanette company.

So Colette struggles between sympathy with and detachment from her characters, and she tries to offer us an entire world despite the limitations of her strongly subjective vision. Generous in her intention if not usually in her execution, Colette wants to give us Paris in all of its fin de siècle color and variety; what we receive, however, is Colette's Paris, which is something quite different. Again, more like memoir than fiction, these stories strictly limit themselves to Colette's experience. We can never quite approach any character's mind other than the one onto which Colette projects herself; the other people she writes about are "mannequins," "dolls," figures in a dream. Here Paris is almost entirely a feminine city, where men are conspicuous by their absence, serving as mere occasions for the women's actions and preoccupations. In this Paris, almost every woman, regardless of her position, is a survivor, struggling through her day, exhibiting "le gout de durer"—the will to survive in confrontation with poverty, obligation, loss of love.

However limited this world of Colette's is, it nevertheless is as rich as a series of memoirs could hope to be. George Eliot has written that memory has as many moods as temper, and here within Colette's memory we are given every mood, every detail of gesture and impulse possible. All of the nostalgia that accompanies memoir enriches Colette's stories, making them moving but not sentimental; the characters here are aware of a better, less fractioned world, a world they have left, and the memory of that world, along with the hope for its return, keeps them going. Somehow we share this nostalgia with the characters who speak for Colette, and we share her conflicting desires to approach and retreat from the preoccupations of her characters. The tension between these impulses remains as unresolved as dreams, as sustained as music, and the moods of the stories, like dreams, stay with us even after we have forgotten their details.

By traveling the distance between cognition and recognition, between imagination and memory, Colette has placed herself in a unique position as a writer. Her insights, spread loosely throughout these brief sketches and stories, become a bit diluted, just as memory becomes experience-once-removed in the act of recollection, with details applied thickly in some places and obscured or ignored in others. Despite this weakness, Colette's work demands to be taken seriously. The mind that remembers these dreams for us and makes us nostalgic for a time we did not know is extraordinary, for it allows us to gain from the mixture of memory and fiction something akin to the rich immediacy of an intense experience. The shared longing for it to stay, and to stay whole, remains.

Time, Gentlemen, Time

THE CULTURE OF TIME AND SPACE, 1880–1918. *By Stephen Kern. Harvard University Press. $25.*

Reviewed by MICHAEL BURNS

Across Europe, through the new Suez Canal to India, Singapore, Hong Kong, and beyond, in first-class train compartments, tramp steamers, on the back of an elephant, and in a makeshift sled skimming along the Omaha snow, Phileas Fogg circumnavigated the globe with his aptly named companion, Passepartout. (Englishmen, the French servant was astounded to learn, were everywhere.) Fogg was considered "a maniac, a crazy man," when he told colleagues at the Reform Club on October 2, 1872, that he would travel around the world in eighty

MICHAEL BURNS teaches modern European history at Mount Holyoke College and is the author of *Rural Society and French Politics: Boulangism and the Dreyfus Affair* (Princeton University Press, 1984).

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days—or, as the punctilious gentleman put it, in "one thousand nine hundred twenty hours, or one hundred fifteen thousand two hundred minutes." But exactly eighty days later, Phileas Fogg, man of his time and of precise timing, symbol of Victoria's confident empire, returned to his comfortable club having conquered the discomforts of time and space.

Stephen Kern's important and imaginative new book reminds us that Jules Verne's story mixed fantasy and fact, and that by 1900 Fogg's eighty days had been cut to forty, thanks to improvements in travel and the introduction of world standard time. With faster, more efficient trains and ships, with startling revolutions in telegraphic communications, a new conception of "public time" marked the years between 1880 and World War I.

The cult of speed and punctuality had its heroes and victims. Four decades after the final leg of Fogg's journey from New York to London, the "fastest and safest" ocean liner ever built steamed at a frightening clip through the ice-filled north Atlantic. Hundreds paid the price for the new obsession with speed, while hundreds more were saved when a nearby ship responded to the wireless SOS. Kern masterfully describes the tragic irony of that night in 1912 when modern technology ruined and rescued the passengers of the *Titanic*.

But the changing nature of public time is only half of Stephen Kern's story. In 1916, Einstein, building on the special theory of 1905, concluded that "every reference body has its own particular time." Few cared, of course, and fewer understood, but relativity in science became a coda to a broader process already felt, seen, and heard in the plastic arts, literature, music, cinema, psychoanalysis, and communications. In the nineteenth century in the West, traditional theories of sequential time had been dissected and rejected, leaving Saint Augustine's old pronouncement intact and more relevant than ever: "What is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain to him who asks me, I do not know."

For Kern, the most "historically unique" contribution of the period—more significant than standardized schedules, sophisticated communications networks, or the exciting (and terrifying) popularity of bicycles, automobiles, and the new promise of flight—was the exploration of a plurality of "private times." Sequence gave way to simultaneity.

The bizarre odyssey of J. K. Huysmans's fictional character Des Esseintes illustrates one consequence of this privatization of time. No less privileged, but far more decadent than the priggish Fogg, Des Esseintes started out in 1884 on a much shorter journey—from Paris to London. Early for his train, he stopped at two "English" bars to set the mood. Two hours later, after rump-steak pie washed down with port, ale, gin, and brandy, after heady reflections on Dickens and Poe, and after nervously checking his watch every five minutes for fear he would miss his train, Des Esseintes returned home, never seeing England but "feeling the physical exhaustion and moral fatigue of a man after a long and perilous journey."

Three years earlier, the American George Beard had noted the pathological effects of punctuality ("a delay of a few minutes might destroy a lifetime"), and though Kern never mentions Des Esseintes, that tense Frenchman personifies Beard's neurasthenic—alternately "overwhelmed and inspired, horrified and enchanted" by the increasing tempo of modern life. For Des Esseintes, the pressures of public time had created a private paralysis.

Loosely chronological in format, *The Culture of Time and Space* looks back to prevailing nineteenth-century perceptions of the past, present, and future, then moves forward through technological, scientific, artistic, and other innovations of the fin de siècle. Their conjuncture made the sense of the present "most distinctively new." The climax is cubism, the quintessential statement of simultaneity, and the visible proof that the two decades on either side of 1900 had shattered classical notions of a beginning, middle, and end. Aristotle barely survived the *belle époque*.

Indebted to phenomenologically oriented psychiatrists who attempt to reconstruct their patients' temporal and spatial experiences, Kern builds his survey of time and space using materials as diverse and evocative as Proust's *madeleine*, Joyce's single Dublin day, Monet's hourly impressions of the Rouen cathedral, the stream of consciousness of William James and Virginia Woolf, the simultaneous prose and poetry of Gertrude Stein and

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Apollinaire, and much more. Joseph Conrad's novels bridge time and space, public and private, and play a special role: in *The Secret Agent* (1907) a plan is afoot to destroy the Greenwich observatory, premier symbol of public time and the constrictions of modern society; and in *The Heart of Darkness* (1899) Marlowe journeys into the vast spaces of central Africa to meet Kurtz, who has taken his own trip into a private and horrific darkness. It is the story of two interiors.

It is also, tangentially, an account of imperialism, another ingredient in Kern's discussion of the new significance of space and distance. For Western powers, the "struggle for existence" became the "struggle for space." In America in the 1890s, Frederick Jackson Turner linked the open spaces of the western frontier to the individualistic spirit and, in turn, to the development of democracy. "National character" and "manifest destiny"—for those who believed that such things existed—had their spatial components. Abroad, brutal economic competition for new markets, along with cultural "civilizing missions," helped fuel the race for expansion and exploitation. In spatial terms, it mattered little if imperialism expressed the last and highest stage of capitalism, as Lenin and others insisted, or the glorious conquest and conversion of benighted "inferiors," as most Westerners believed. Whatever the motivation or justification, it led to the annexation of space and represented an "active appropriation of the future." At the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, European powers meticulously divided their African possessions, reshaping the "dark continent" in their image for their own international and domestic purposes. By 1914, Europe held 11.5 million square miles of African territory, with only Abyssinia and Liberia escaping its grasp.

The 1884–85 conference took place, not in Senegal or in Kenya, but in Germany; and Africans did not attend. Distant demands and social upheavals in the colonies could be delayed, ignored, or repressed with relative ease. But closer to home, in the cities and industrial towns of Europe where populations had grown exponentially through the nineteenth century, "social distance" posed new and worrisome problems. The number of German cities with populations over one hundred thousand increased from fourteen to forty-eight between 1800 and 1913; London numbered more than seven million in 1914; and though France enjoyed a thriving cottage industry from books and pamphlets lamenting *dénatalité*, its cities also grew. Greater Paris counted four million on the eve of World War I.

Many European cities had tried to prepare for the consequences of this disintegration of urban space in the generation before 1880; Baron Haussmann's expansive Parisian boulevards and the Ringstrasse in Vienna date from the 1850s through the 1870s. But it was in the fin de siècle that anxieties over population density became acute, and "crowd psychologists" sounded the alarm. Laboring classes, many believed, were dangerous classes, and encroaching communities of urban undesirables, like infectious bacteria, were thought to undermine public health. Enlightened city planners struggled with housing problems, sanitation, transportation, and more, while less benevolent officials leveled neighborhoods and redirected streets to create urban oases safe from the spreading masses.

But demographic pressures overwhelmed planners and instilled fear in those for whom mass culture meant no culture and democracy meant the rule of the mob. It is revealing that Nietzsche (who cared not at all for the masses) and, later, Orwell (who cared a great deal) both considered smell a social indicator of the modern industrial age. The urban poor had always smelled, and so had the rich, but with the contraction of social distance they came close enough to tell the difference. Like most of the social, cultural, and other changes outlined by Kern, it was a matter of degree—of how quickly cities had transformed in the late nineteenth century, of how thoroughly the physical and metaphorical problems of social distance had attracted psychologists, sociologists, novelists, poets, and painters.

Throughout, Kern adapts the phenomenological method "informally," aware that psychiatrists search for causes and cures, while he aims to survey and synthesize. There are echoes here of Carl Schorske and Roger Shattuck on Vienna and Paris, Siegfried Giedion on space and time, Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle*, H. Stuart Hughes's intellectual histories of the pre-war era, as well as deft summaries of the massive literature on scientific and technological change. More descrip-

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tive than analytical, the book has a broad scope and spirited style that make for a splendid survey of the temporal and spatial perceptions of, for the most part, urban and educated Europeans and Americans.

In 1880, however, more than half the population of some European nations—and a significant minority in all others—still lived in rural settings, bound to the time of the seasons, the space of the fields, and the culture of agriculture. Clocks and watches arrived late in peasant homes and pockets, and while Millet's celebrated painting *Angelus* (1859) idealized rural life, its scene still applied at the end of the century in much of the countryside where church bells announced the beginning and end of the rural workday. In France, *journée* meant many things, including the plot of land a peasant could till from dawn to dusk. Still, this other side of Western time and space, only sketched by Kern, fits neatly with his belief that 1880–1918 marked a pivotal period; during those years, depending on the locality, Europe and America became more urban than rural, and (public) notions of time and space became more homogenized.

In the summer of 1914, millions of country people, responding to orders sent by telegraph to their villages and towns, marched through "wheat's restless silence" (Philip Larkin *dixit*) to join their urban counterparts in the trenches of World War I. Europeans went to war "ragtime," says Kern—confused, terrified, and overwhelmed by the dizzying pace of events. His last, dramatic chapters recount the rapid, reckless threats and counterthreats of that summer, from the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand to Austria's declaration of war on Serbia.

The flurry of wireless messages that had spread the news of the *Titanic* disaster in 1912, and had saved hundreds of passengers, helped set in motion the machinery of destruction two years later. Kaiser Wilhelm, Czar Nicholas, and dozens of lesser figures across Europe negotiated by telegraph, and their exchanges signaled not only quick and bellicose demands, but an end to the "slow pace of traditional diplomacy." When the wireless clicked orders over vast spaces in late July, the "greatest spontaneous movement of forces so far in history" unfolded in a matter of hours. A Russian general captured the significance for his time, and, unhappily,

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for ours: "One has only to press the button and the whole state begins to function automatically with the precision of a clock's mechanism. . . . Once the moment has been fixed, everything is settled; there is no going back; it determines mechanically the beginning of war."

George Dangerfield once said that World War I changed nothing and hastened everything. Kern calls it "*the* simultaneous drama," a "cubist war" in which the inventor of modern military camouflage could point to Picasso as his aesthetic inspiration. Swept along by the speed and significance of his subject, Kern tends to forget that time and space play crucial roles in all military campaigns, that "the vital present occupies and grips" the minds of terrified soldiers in all wars, in all centuries. But the sins of reductionism are few and venal in this persuasive, thought-provoking survey of a prelude and a conjuncture. Moving in, out, and around bewildering innovations in science and technology, literature and the arts, Kern's book, like Braque's pictures and Apollinaire's poetry, is a creative history of the age of simultaneity, of changing notions of temporal and spatial experience, and the ways in which those changes helped shape the sensibilities of the generation of 1914.

Elegiac Melodies

WILLA: THE LIFE OF WILLA CATHER. *By Phyllis C. Robinson. Doubleday. $17.95.*

Reviewed by ROBERT LEITER

Willa Cather, one of America's finest writers, is not much in fashion these days. It was Cather's belief that greatness was to be found only in the past, and so she wrote elegies to all that was lost when, in her words, "the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts." Hers was a powerful theme and acknowledged as such by discerning critics. But her novels and stories, populated as they are with characters who must make sacrifices in their lives (and through these sacrifices gain in strength), seem not to speak to our hedonistic age.

✪ ROBERT LEITER's work has appeared in the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, *Commonweal*, *Dissent*, and many other journals.

The appearance of a new biography of Cather is, then, a curious event. There is no shortage of information available about Willa Cather, and there exists a perfectly commendable, highly sympathetic biography of the writer by E. K. Brown, which first appeared thirty years ago and would seem difficult to match or surpass.

In light of this, why has Phyllis C. Robinson taken it upon herself to tell the life of Willa Cather yet again? The only possible reason—aside from satisfying a publisher's demands—would be that Robinson has something new to tell us, either in the form of recently discovered information or by way of a unique interpretation. The former is the case here, but the results are regrettable.

Robinson's book is workmanlike, with prose more serviceable than inspired. The facts of Cather's life, however, give her little problem. Cather was born in western Virginia in 1873, but at the age of nine, she was taken by her family to live in Nebraska. The strangeness of the land, the unpredictability of life there, left its mark upon the young child; and it took Cather many years to make peace with the midwestern plains.

After a difficult year living on the prairie, the Cather family sold their farm and moved into the town of Red Cloud. There Willa Cather felt constrained by small-town life and the expectations of society. She rebelled by cutting her hair short, wearing men's clothing, and insisting upon being called William. By the time she attended the University of Nebraska, she had tempered her rebelliousness a bit; she began instead to write stories and drama criticism for school publications and the local newspaper.

After college Cather did not return to Red Cloud but stayed on in Lincoln. From there she went to Pittsburgh, making her living in both places as a journalist. But when next she fled, it was to New York, where she worked as managing editor of *McClure's Magazine*. During these periods she wrote some of her finest stories; yet it was not until she was forty years old that she began to write full time. She left *McClure's*, and in 1912 took an apartment at 5 Bank Street in Manhattan with her lifelong friend Edith Lewis. It was there that she wrote her important novels: *O Pioneers!*, *My Ántonia*, *One of Ours*, *A Lost Lady*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

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In later life—though she continued to write and publish novels—Cather became something of a recluse, rarely venturing beyond the confines of her apartment. Her last work, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, appeared in 1940. Cather died seven years later.

Though rarely insightful about Cather's art, Robinson does convey to the reader just what kind of person Cather was and the sort of atmosphere she needed in order to create her fiction. Like her characters, Willa Cather was aware that sacrifice was necessary to sustain an artistic career.

In an essay on Katherine Mansfield, Cather wrote that "the mere struggle to have anything of one's own, to be one's self at all, creates an element of strain which keeps everybody almost at the breaking point." For Cather, Mansfield knew "all about the secret accords and antipathies which lie hidden under our everyday behavior."

By necessity, Cather was a discreet person. Robinson is aware of this, but it does not make her happy. She relates the story of how, under directives from Cather, Edith Lewis burned almost all of Cather's early correspondence. Robinson's annoyance is almost palpable, as if she cannot forgive Cather for having made the biographer's job so difficult. She also states that Lewis must bear responsibility for this incalculable loss that has "forced us to rely on what [Cather] wrote years later for a glimpse of what she must have been in those Red Cloud days." Rather than indulging in such fits of pique, Robinson might better have spent her time trying to understand why Cather felt compelled to burn her letters.

But Robinson's gravest error comes in her depiction of Cather as a lesbian. This is the "new information"—the raison d'être—of this biography. The assertion is distressing for numerous reasons, the most significant being that it is unsubstantiated. Robinson states her case, then proceeds by means of wild conjecture.

She makes much of Cather's dressing like a boy and being called William; then she tells us that "the most serious attachment of Willa's college life was . . . the daughter of a prominent Lincoln family, Louise Pound." This relationship, this "obsession," as Robinson would have it, ended badly. Robinson asks whether or not the relationship might have been deemed unnatural, whether or not the

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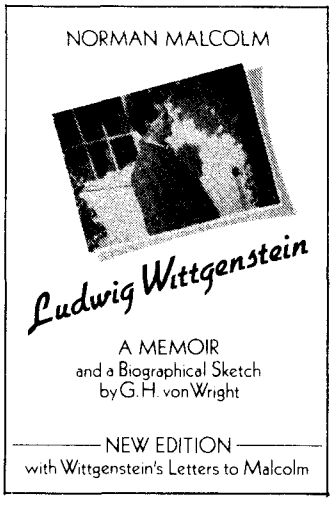

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word *lesbian* was ever used to describe it. "We do not know," Robinson admits. "We do know, however, that losing Louise caused Willa the most intense suffering she had ever known. In despair, she vowed to herself to be more cautious and less impetuous in her affections in the future."

How does Robinson know all this? Checking her sources, we read in her notes that she has speculated about how the friendship ended and that her speculations offer "a not unreasonable explanation in the absence of any other evidence." As to Cather's intense suffering, there is no source cited for this information. And if we check E. K. Brown's single reference to Louise Pound, we read that Louise was among Cather's principal friends in Lincoln, which seems more to the point.

Robinson also makes much of Cather's friendship with Isabelle McClung. Clearly Isabelle was one of Cather's closest friends, but to define the relationship in a sexual way seems extreme. Cather lived in the McClung mansion during much of the time she spent in Pittsburgh. E. K. Brown tells us that Isabelle's parents "at first wondered at the propriety of having Willa Cather come to reside in the household, though they welcomed her as their daughter's friend."

Brown also writes that, for Cather, living at the McClung mansion "meant release from boarding-house life and greater freedom to write in ideal surroundings." And all of this makes sense when we read Elizabeth Moorhead's description of Isabelle: she was "the most beautiful girl I had ever seen . . . large of mind and heart, entirely frank and simple with natural dignity of manner. Not an artist in the sense of producing, she could identify herself wholly with the artist's efforts and aims. She had an infallible instinct for all the arts. She never mistook the second-best for the best. She became for Willa Cather what every writer needs most, the helping friend."

Robinson does even more damage when she applies her theory of lesbianism to Cather's fiction. She notes that so many of Cather's books are about beautiful women as seen through the eyes of men. "Would *My Antonia*, for one, or *A Lost Lady* have been better books if they had been told from the point of view of women instead of men?" That Cather writes about beautiful or exceptional women seems to Robinson an admission of lesbianism. But her statement reflects at least a misreading of *A Lost Lady*. Marian Forrester, the novel's heroine, has greatness in addition to beauty only as long as she is married to a great man, Captain Forrester, the embodiment of the pioneer spirit Cather so admired. But with the death of the Captain, Marian Forrester is transformed into a frivolous beauty, her greatness gone; she is no more than "a lost lady."

What is most frustrating about Robinson's biography is that she seems to want it both ways: she wants a Cather who is passionate and secretly sensual as well as a Cather who is discreet and has control of her emotions. (Or perhaps the problem is that Robinson is simply not aware of the inconsistencies in her portrait.) Robinson writes of Cather that she "cared too much for order . . . to be quite comfortable with attitudes that seemed to her to verge on anarchy" and that Cather was shocked by Oscar Wilde's behavior. She thought that Wilde deserved his prison sentence because of the nature of his crime—homosexuality. But there was a more serious crime in Cather's opinion—Wilde's insincerity as an artist. "She loathed his artificiality, his flippant epigrams and mannered witticisms," Robinson writes. "They represented everything she most disliked in art and literature." Willa Cather favored what she called the healthy commonplace. "She took her stand early on the side of sense, action and control as opposed to sensibility, introspection and emotional profligacy."

But let us assume, for argument's sake, that Robinson is correct, that Cather was a lesbian. What does this tell us about her life and art? In the end nothing is gained through this knowledge and much is lost if one considers Robinson's excursions into literary criticism.

E. K. Brown's biography is superior to Robinson's, not only because it is better written, but also because its very structure tells us something about Cather the artist. Brown's book is divided into two sections. In the first he shows how Cather strove to free herself of the Middle West, to move beyond the confines of small-town life. In the second half of the book he shows how Cather made peace at last with the land of her youth and how, out of this appeasement, her mature work arose. Here at least we are offered a viewpoint, an attitude, that assists us in understanding Cather's novels and stories.

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This, of course, should be the first priority of any biographer of a great writer. But another rule to follow, especially with an individual as discreet as Cather, is to decide just what material is of importance. Robinson seems to have bowed to market considerations, to have wanted only to carve for herself a piece of the zeitgeist.

Visual Gossip

KARSH: A FIFTY-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE. *By Yousuf Karsh. Little, Brown. $50.*

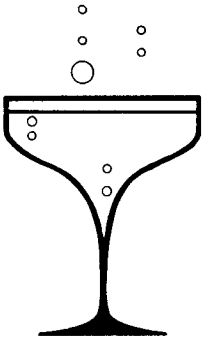
ANNIE LEIBOVITZ: PHOTOGRAPHS. *By Annie Leibovitz. Introduction by Tom Wolfe. Pantheon. $35.*

Reviewed by JAMES KAUFMANN

Rare indeed is the collection of celebrity portraits that does not somewhere in its introduction promise, like a hot date, that you are about to see something special. There are more than a few celebrity photographers around, but those whose work is collected in book form are usually thought to have special access to the elusive truth of their subjects. In *The Revealing Eye*, a book of Nicholas Muray's portraits of 1920s celebrities, Paul Gallico asked: "How did they look? How did they dress? And, above all, what were they really like in their lives and times? The answers to these questions have been and still continue to be supplied by men of the caliber of Steichen, Karsh, Beaton, Baron and Muray." A more oblique tack is taken by Alan Ross in his introduction to the recent *Bill Brandt: Portraits:* "Brandt seems to have an unerring sense of context, an ability to suggest, in the relation of subject to his or her background, strange and fruitful affinities." More modest is John Mortimer in *Snowdon: Sittings, 1979 to 1983:* "The pictures in this book are all in quest of a certain truth about their sitters." For some reason, photographers are thought to be able to see the real character of celebrities, while the ordinary public's view is obstructed.

Photographers themselves, alas, are more

JAMES KAUFMANN, book editor of the *Photographer's Forum*, is at work on a book of essays on photography.



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skeptical. Arnold Newman observes that "it seems to me that no one picture can ever be the summation of a personality." Snowdon realizes that "the photographer is essentially unimportant. It is the subject that is being recorded that is all important." Knowing the importance of accumulation in photography, Alfred Stieglitz produced a portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe that is composed of more than five hundred images. Most portrait photographers clearly do not believe the old bromide that a single image can summarize the essence of an individual.

The solo celebrity portrait (or any portrait, for that matter) is like a paragraph lifted from a biography or a striking phrase taken from a poem—it may be beautiful, and it may be revealing, but it is very far from the whole story. Still, we seem to have an insatiable appetite for celebrity portraits. Two of our most popular, though very different, portraitists have new books out to appease the hunger, books that demonstrate that what Charles Dickens said about portrait painting also applies to photography: "There are only two styles of portrait painting: the serious and the smirk."

The serious style is represented by Yousuf Karsh, whose latest book, *Karsh: A Fifty-Year Retrospective*, summarizes a prodigious career, while the smirking style is practiced by Annie Leibovitz in *Annie Leibovitz: Photographs*, one of the most talked about anthologies of photographs of famous people to come along in some time. (It has sold out a first printing of twenty-five thousand—extraordinary for a photography book.)

Karsh's dramatically lit faces are known to anyone who read magazines in the 1940s and 1950s. So persuasive are many of his portraits—Churchill, Einstein, Hemingway, Helen Keller—that they have often become the classic images we conjure up to tell us how these well-known people looked. A Karsh portrait is instantly recognizable: it is a dramatically lit and expressive symphony in middle grays, and the subject's look is inevitably, in the cant phrase of the day, "meaningful." Those who commission a Karsh portrait must do so in part to prove their eminence—and also because they know what they are going to get.

The text of *Karsh: A Fifty-Year Retrospective* is divided into ten chapters. The first, a brief autobiographical introduction, is the quintessential immigrant-boy-makes-good story. It begins:

> On the stormy New Year's Eve of 1924, the liner *Versailles* reached Halifax from Beirut. After a voyage of twenty-nine days, her most excited passenger in the steerage class must have been a sixteen-year-old Armenian boy who spoke little French, and less English. I was that boy.

The remainder of the introduction, which frequently steps over the line separating sentiment from sentimentality, tells of Karsh's apprenticeship with John H. Garo in Boston in the 1920s, his climb to success, the fruits of success, and concludes with the following:

> My own quest now has stretched for over half a lifetime. The search for greatness of spirit has compelled me to work harder—to strive for perfection, knowing it to be unattainable. My quest has brought me great joy when something close to my ideal has been attained. It has kept me forever young in heart, adventurous, forever seeking, and always aware that the heart and the mind are the true lens of the camera.

Inspirational matters aside, Karsh's subjects take themselves seriously—much more seriously than do Leibovitz's—and they are celebrities who have stood the test of time, or are likely to do so. Humphrey Bogart, Nikita Khrushchev, Fidel Castro, Georgia O'Keeffe, Joan Miró, Albert Schweitzer, Jascha Heifetz, John F. Kennedy, Linus Pauling, Carl Jung—all are likely to persist in the public mind. Many of those who appear in the chapters titled, variously, "Authors," "Statesmen," "Scientists and Physicians," "Artists," "Musicians," and "Actors and Actresses" have already been judged as great figures, or eminences; Karsh's style simply further ennobles them.

The same cannot be said for those who populate *Annie Leibovitz: Photographs*. Where Karsh's authors are Thomas Mann, John Steinbeck, and Albert Camus, Leibovitz gives us Jerzy Kosinski, Tom Wolfe, and John Irving. *Musician* to Karsh means Jean Sibelius, Arthur Rubinstein, or Pablo Casals; to Leibovitz it means the Rolling Stones, the Who, or Elvis Costello. Involved are two different audiences, two different generations, two different cultures.

No doubt some of the people recorded by

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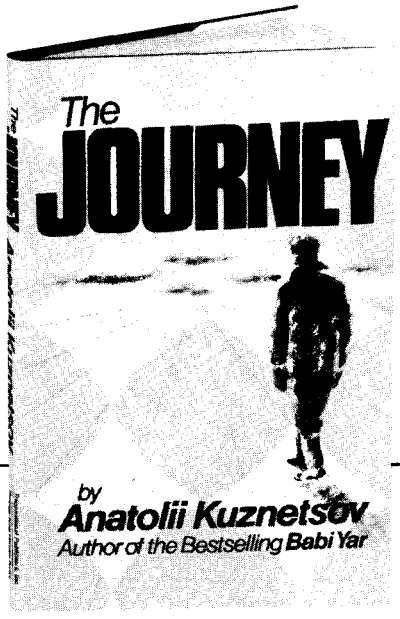
Leibovitz will persist in history books, but in most cases it's really too early to tell. Take, for example, her portrait of an unlikely duo, Billy Carter and Margaux Hemingway, surrounded by cases of beer in a Plains, Georgia, back room. These are the sort of people Daniel Boorstin described as "well-known for being well-known," and Leibovitz's portrait of them is a cultural wisecrack, a joke that, seen a generation from now, will mean little.

Leibovitz is more a journalist than Karsh, whose portraits are as much a confirmation of the successful life as a big house, insured jewelry, and estate planning. Of course, Leibovitz's subjects have "made it" too. Calvin Klein, Clint Eastwood, O. J. Simpson, Robert Redford, and Bob Dylan won't ever go hungry, but, unlike Karsh's subjects, they are not politicians, scientists, or artists. They are popular rather than respected, which may be the difference between serious and pop culture. Leibovitz's subjects are all the rage, in most cases, with the young (or would-be young), and her monograph seems to confirm Oscar Wilde's idea that youth is America's oldest tradition.

This isn't surprising, given that Leibovitz's work evolved in the hothouse that is popular journalism: she was the chief photographer of *Rolling Stone* from 1973 until last year, when she signed on for a year with *Vanity Fair*. Unlike Karsh, though, Leibovitz does not like to be considered a celebrity photographer. In a recent article in *American Photographer*, Laurence Shames says that "she positively bristles at the phrase. 'Whaddya mean, *celebrity* photographer?' she'll demand. 'What's a celebrity? I don't see these people as *celebrities*—I see them as interesting, talented people, period. So what's the label all about?' "

Well, it's about convenience, for one thing, but it's also about fact. Leibovitz may not think of her subjects as celebrities, and they may well be her friends, but to those of us who look at her book, there can be no doubt about the social status of her subjects. Maybe Leibovitz is saying that she's on the same plane as her subjects, and thus the paparazzo image doesn't fit her. It's true that the strangeness of some of the portraits—Clint Eastwood in bondage, Lauren Hutton in mud, Robert Penn Warren topless—suggests that her art is



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more about the triumph of the will than genuflection. But that seems to be what pop photojournalism is all about.

Tom Wolfe, who wrote the introduction to *Annie Leibovitz: Photographs*, wonders, "Why are so many celebrities willing, even desperate, to take their shirts off for the photographer? . . . In these pages, we see glamour succumbing to that great passion of the Sixties, *nostalgie de la bone*, nostalgia for the mud." The celebrities of today "made it glamorous for stars to look like raw vital proles." Leibovitz's celebrities don't represent Olympian heights as Karsh's subjects do; instead, they're just folks who live closer to the edge than we do. A slick artifice, this, one that Leibovitz handles beautifully—but an artifice just the same. Her images, striking though they are, lead us no closer to the reality of the famous than a Karsh or a Beaton or a Brandt. We don't know these people; we never have and we never will.

The celebrity portrait, whether by Karsh or by Leibovitz, is simply visual gossip. It can be sophisticated or crude or funky or noble, but whatever its style, its purpose is to reveal those we would like to know but to whom we have no access. Celebrity photographers promise access to that other world—they are supposed to be our guides, but when we follow the traces they leave on the path to the famous, we find no one at the end but ourselves.

The Refusal of Grandeur

THE AENEID. *By Virgil, translated by Robert Fitzgerald. Random House.* $20.

Reviewed by W. R. JOHNSON

Though "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" excuses it all, various literary misdemeanors may be fairly laid at Coleridge's doorstep. For one, he saw fit to share with the English-speaking world the peculiarly nasty strain of German Romantic "Thought" that had attacked his system, and we are still suffering from the effects of his unfortunate generosity on this score. For another, Coleridge somehow took it into his head to persuade Wordsworth, who had completed translating the first three books of Virgil's *Aeneid*, to desist from his endeavors, thereby depriving us of what promised to be a very remarkable, perhaps even a great, English version of the poem. After Wordsworth quit the field, none of the later great English poets was to undertake this heartless (and maybe hopeless) task. And that leaves us—unless we have the time and patience to grapple with Gavin Douglas's Scottish—with Dryden.

The Dryden version's chief trouble is Pope's *Iliad*. Once Pope, working with the same forms and styles that Dryden had used for Virgil, had completed his great translation of Homer, the errors and inadequacies of Dryden were put in an irremediably sharp focus. Where Pope is vigorous or elegant or both, as the case demands, Dryden is invariably witty and pretty; where Pope is very reverent but very self-reliant, Dryden manages to be at once obsequious and condescending. Pope translates *us* back into the *Iliad* by making it modern without evading either its splendors or its barbarities. What Dryden does with and to the *Aeneid* is to transform himself into a chatty tour guide, his readers into credulous tourists, and the poem into a charming antique, rather casually restored, brilliantly varnished, then encased in glass. In short, no great English poet has yet given us a great English *Aeneid*, one that, like Pope's and Chapman's Homer, having endured the slanders of vogue-mongers, survives the shifts of fashion to pass into permanence.

There have been decent and even good translations of Virgil's epic over the centuries. But, like other Latin poetry, the *Aeneid* resists translation in ways that Greek poetry (and especially, perhaps, Homer) does not. If a translation of ancient Greek poetry fails to offer much in the way of verbal beauty that suggests or represents the beauties of the original, there usually remains (unless the poet is Pindar or the translation is unusually wretched) something of the original's feeling and thought, something of the images that configure that feeling and thought. With Latin poetry, the case is very different. If you take

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from Latin poetry its complex verbal textures, its rhetorical contraptions, what you are pretty much left with are what seem like tepid platitudes and faded pictures. In this regard, a prime problem for the translator of Latin poetry (and prose as well) is that simple, common Latin words are possessed of a resonance and a subtle prism of tone and nuance that simple, common English words do not command. But if the translator tries to make good this deficiency by various expansions, he is prone to end with saccharine mush. Robert Fitzgerald, who seems to understand these special pitfalls very well, has elected to shape a difficult, daring solution to the problems of making a contemporary translation of Virgil's familiar yet baffling poem. He diminishes its ornaments and sonorities radically and offers in compensation lean syntax, cool diction, and cooler music.

What is perhaps the most famous single line in the *Aeneid* offers a fair test of the strength and the weakness of Fitzgerald's strategies of translation. Here is W. F. Jackson Knight's reasonably literal prose rendering of Aeneas's speech as he stands at the temple of Juno in Carthage and looks at the representations of Troy's defeat (lines 459–64 of the Latin text):

"O Achates, where in the world is there a country, or any place in it, unreached by our suffering? Look! there is Priam. Even here high merit has its due; there is pity for a world's distress and a sympathy for short-lived humanity (*sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt*). Dispel all fear. The knowledge of you shown here will help save you." So he spoke. It was only a picture, but sighing deeply he let his thoughts feed on it, and his face was wet with a stream of tears.

Here, by way of contrast, is Dryden, cranking up his calliope and not paying much attention (as Wordsworth was to complain) to the Latin:

"O friend! ev'n here
The monuments of Trojan woes appear!
Our known disasters fill ev'n foreign lands:
See there, where old unhappy Priam stands!
Ev'n the mute walls relate the warrior's fame,
And Trojan griefs the Tyrians' pity claim."
He said (his tears a ready passage find),
Devouring what he saw so well design'd,
And with an empty picture fed his mind.

Bobbing up and down in the wreckage with the *ev'ns* and apostrophes are Priam (who has grown from two words into a whole bathetic line and has become in the process a kind of Covent Garden Polonius) and *lacrimae rerum* and *mortalia*, which have endured grotesque mutation—into the balanced antithesis of Trojan/Tyrian, grief/pity. Here is Wordsworth:

"By whom, Achates, hath not Troy been named?
What region of the earth but overflows
With us and the memorials of our woes?
Lo Priamus! Here also do they raise
To virtue's deeds fit monuments of praise.
Tears for the frail estate of human kind
Are shed; and mortal changes touch the mind."
He spake (nor might the gushing tears controul);
And with an empty Picture feeds his soul.

Line 463 ("dispel all fear"—*solve metus*) has here disappeared, and with it some of the scene's tension and balance; but the great line (*lacrimae rerum, mortalia*), here expanded into two lines, finds superb resonance. Behind that resonance, nourishing its sound, its clarity, its control, is all that is best in Wordsworth's own poetry. The English lines, like their Latin original, are shaped by real nobility and real humanity. The rest of the speech shows clean severity and delicacy of ornament. Its splendor has been carefully tempered and thereby survives its transformation. Here, if anywhere, Virgil has been Englished.

Fitzgerald gives us this:

"What spot on earth,"
He said, "what region of the earth, Achates,
Is not full of the story of our sorrow?
Look, here is Priam. Even so far away
Great valor has due honor; they weep here
For how the world goes, and our life that passes
Touches their heart. Throw off your fear. This fame
Insures some kind of refuge." He broke off
To feast his eyes and mind on a mere image,
Sighing often, cheeks grown wet with tears.

Here nothing has been left out. "Some kind of refuge"/*aliquam salutem*—Wordsworth skipped this, refusing Virgil's qualification. But "some kind of refuge" is exactly what Virgil said, and Fitzgerald closes with this stern hope perfectly. And the great line is greatly translated. But, in Wordsworth, the universality that Virgil suggests is retained; Fitzgerald particularizes both the tears (*they* weep *here*) and the sorrows of mortality (touches *their* hearts). "How the world goes"

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and "our life that passes" are miracles of felicity, in their way; they offer, in place of sublimity, terse acceptance and sober understatement; they are poignancies glimpsed and let go. This radical diminuendo, at once astonishing and irritating, is greatly enhanced by the precision of Fitzgerald's cadence here, which is unemphatic, almost casual. (In passing: this translation offers some of the most brilliant, most original decasyllabics of our century. The fluent, flexible iambics of Fitzgerald's Homeric translations have, for the Latin poet, changed into something new, something less supple, more taut, more angular: *émaux et camées.*)

Where Virgil himself is subdued or, as in Book 5 and much of Books 9 through 12, where he is or seems to be at his most Homeric, Fitzgerald's dry brilliance and studied anti-rhetoric invariably hit the mark. But when Virgil's Latin is, as it very often is, massive or gorgeous or hauntingly ambivalent, this version's exquisite restraint and severe tempos tend to create disturbing, fascinating, yet sometimes unsatisfying distortions. When, for instance, Dido makes her grand entrance in Book 4 as maiden-huntress, though Fitzgerald provides the scene with all its proper color and panache, if one looks at Douglas's rendering (or Dryden's even), not to mention the original, one senses that the motion and the emotion of the scene—it is shot through with ironies both witty and sinister—have taken on in Fitzgerald's handling of them a curiously static quality, have somehow become fixed in a mosaic pattern. This is a remarkable effect, and it gives a curious pleasure. This is, indeed, part of what Virgil does in this scene and elsewhere, but it is hardly all that he is doing here and elsewhere. In its deliberate retreat from grand rhetoric, its constant search for understatement, its subdued feelings and closely bridled rhythms, this version offers exactly what the age demands—it lets us see, all but forces us to see, Virgil's splendors and miseries in slow motion, through a narrow window. That works and doesn't work because the demands of the age and the demands of Virgil are essentially incompatible.

It is in the speeches that Fitzgerald's dry style seems to me to work to least advantage. To Aeneas's laconic utterances it is admirably suited, and to Turnus's great speech in Book 11 it gives a harsh, sustained force that is right on target for what the speech means (though not for how that meaning is conveyed). In most of the other speeches, however, particularly in those of the gods and most particularly in those of Dido, the stripped diction and the severe cadences overemphasize the absence of high rhetoric; what should be passionate and, in Dido's case, almost operatic (Verdi, not Purcell) verges instead on something thin, listless. Here, and perhaps here only, Fitzgerald's refusal of grandeur fails completely of the astonishing effects it often achieves elsewhere. An example of this kind of failure can be clearly seen in Dido's words just before she stabs herself (here is Jackson Knight's translation, Latin text, 4.651–654):

> Sweet relics, sweet so long as God and Destiny allowed, now received my life-breath, and set me free from this suffering. I have lived my life and finished the course which Fortune allotted me. Now my wraith shall pass in state to the world below (*et nunc magna mei sub terras ibit imago*).

Dido is crazed here; she is guilty, frightened, despairing, and angry. But at this moment, out of the ugly wreck of her life, she seizes, for a second (and the second is enough), some splendor. "And now *great* of me under the lands will go the *image.*" Simple words enough. But in their cadence and their placement they token a glory that, though snatched briefly from frenzy, is authentic. Jackson Knight's "in state" is not at all a bad way of dealing with what is essentially impossible. Allen Mandelbaum, whose translation of the *Aeneid* I like very much, not least because he arranges various effective accommodations between traditional English styles and current speech and because he keeps a close eye on Virgil's rhetorical modulations, has this:

> And now my Shade will pass, illustrious,
> beneath the earth.

That gives some approximation of Virgil's sound in this line, and *illustrious* renders *magna* beautifully. For some it will seem overdone, will seem to call too much attention to itself—will seem to be too Latinate. But if it fails to have, cannot have, the simplicity of *magna,* it achieves its magnificence and it defines the weight that *magna* has and must

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have in this line, in this scene, in Book 4.

Fitzgerald has scrapped all of this:

> Remnants dear to me
> While god and fate allowed it, take this breath
> And give me respite from these agonies.
> I lived my life out to the very end
> And passed the stages Fortune had appointed.
> Now my tall shade goes to the under world.

The translation "I lived my life out to the very end" seems to me, in phrasing and in sound, flat by design. Virgil has two verbs, "I have lived" (*vixi*) and "I have accomplished" (*peregi*), beginning and ending this verse; this sonority Fitzgerald deliberately undercuts. So, in the great line that follows, "tall shade" is wholly inadequate. *Tall*, perhaps, may be forced to mean *statuesque*, hence *majestic*. But Dido does not mean *tall*, she means *magnificent*. And she is not unaware that a magnificent illusion (*imago:* echo, phantom, mere image, lie) is what she has been in danger of becoming and is now about to become forever. Magnificent illusion: that oxymoron is typically Virgilian and is what this speech and this scene are mostly about. Mandelbaum gets close to this tragic irony by emphasizing what is grand about it. Fitzgerald, here as often elsewhere, shuts the door on it and locks it away from us. Dido cannot submit to the restaints of even this most subtle of plain styles. If her rhetoric doesn't rumble and her cadences don't boom out, she dwindles away. She needs fierce fire and loud music. She is, moreover, at the heart of the first third of the poem (in a sense, she *is* the first third) and gives to the rest of the poem much of its meaning and momentum. To fetter and gag her is to do peculiar things to the entire poem.

Where it is chiefly a question of etching an image quickly and clearly, where Homeric battles are recalled and pondered, Fitzgerald's spare syntax and sharp, stern diction achieve their purposes brilliantly. Where there are clouded speeches or obscure, violent emotions or narrative waverings, his consummate economies tend, in varying degrees and varying ways, to be in conflict with Virgil. Yet despite these reservations, I find this *Aeneid* a triumph of poetic imagination and of supreme craftsmanship. So let me close by stressing Fitzgerald's triumph. I quote his renderings of two of my favorite passages, lines that offer their translators nothing but trouble:

> Now dim to one another
> In desolate night they walked on through the gloom,
> Through Dis's homes all void, and empty realms,
> As one goes through a wood by a faint moon's
> Treacherous light, when Jupiter veils the sky
> And black night blots the colors of the world.
> (Book 6, p. 168)

> This way and that
> He let his mind run, passing quickly over
> All he might do, as when from basins full
> Of unstilled water, struck by a ray of sun
> Or the bright disk of moon, a flickering light
> Plays over walls and corners and flies up
> To hit high roofbeams and a coffered ceiling.
> (Book 8, p. 230)

Here, and again and again throughout his translation, Fitzgerald clears the hurdles with a grace and a power, uniquely his, that catch at the heart.

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Archytas's Dream

THE MONTGOLFIER BROTHERS AND THE INVENTION OF AVIATION. *By Charles Coulston Gillispie. Princeton University Press.* $35.

Reviewed by GREGORY MCNAMEE

Sometime toward the end of the fourth century B.C., the Greek colonists at Taras, in southern Italy, were treated to an exhibition of mechanical magic the likes of which no man or woman had ever seen before. The spectacle came to them through the courtesy of their neighbor Archytas, a devotee of Pythagoras and a prominent local politician, who, it is said, once counted the grains of sand that formed the beach near his home, distinguished harmonic from arithmetic progression, and went on to invent an astonishing apparatus:

> Archytas crafted the figure of a dove from wood, and this, through some kind of instruction and by means of mechanical manipulation, was able to fly. That is to say, it had a system of weights and counterweights to keep it level, and it was powered by an internal steam engine of some sort. . . . However, when it ran aground, it could not be made to move again (Aulus Gellius X 12, 8).

Antiquity has not recorded for us whether Archytas, whom Plato himself traveled from Athens to see, publicly performed his mechanico-avian experiment a second time. Indeed, Archytas fades from the contemporary record, to be commemorated centuries after his exhibition in an ode by Horace and in a biographical sketch by Diogenes Laertius, who tells us that Archytas, the failed aviator, abandoned his homeland and was killed in a shipwreck in 394 B.C.

If we are to trust our classical informants—and there is no reason why we should not—then Charles Coulston Gillispie's *Montgolfier Brothers and the Invention of Aviation* stands guilty of being slightly mistitled. That is, however, the only fault of Gillispie's important study, published in celebration of the bicentennial of mankind's first true conquest of the air, which was executed on June 4, 1783, by two remarkable men.

Joseph (1740–1810) and Etienne (1745–1799) Montgolfier, autodidactic sons of a wealthy papermaker, sent up their invention, an unmanned experimental balloon weighing five hundred pounds with a displacement of twenty-eight-thousand cubic feet, in the calm morning sky over Annonay, their native village in the Ardèche region of France. The balloon, given lift by heat from a fire of shredded wool and straw, rose three thousand feet and promptly fell to earth, having drifted one and a half miles or so. It landed in a vineyard, scattering the astonished field hands at work there, and tipped over. Embers from the brazier set fire to the paper-lined balloon, and the craft was lost in an instant. The entire experiment lasted for something like ten minutes.

The incident stands as the first public trial of flight, if we, like Gillispie, choose to ignore the story of Archytas. That it took place at all owes to the coincidence of several scientific discoveries in the Age of Reason: Joseph Priestley's identification of oxygen in 1774; the isolation of hydrogen by Henry Cavendish in 1766; Lavoisier's demonstration that the two elements together composed water and could be separated; and the publication, in 1783, of Leonhard Euler's posthumous paper on the physical laws governing "the vertical motion of a globe rising in calm air." Add to these signal achievements the Montgolfiers, who had trained themselves impeccably in statics, dynamics, and mechanics, and whose considerable self-education was augmented by a healthy degree of imagination (the contemporary philosopher Joseph Degérando reports that the Montgolfiers' invention was the fruit of a daydream). One evening Joseph Montgolfier, it seems, had been speculating that Gibraltar, besieged on land and sea by the Spanish from 1779 to 1783, might only be conquered from the air. A few moments later, he observed sparks being carried up his chimney by the warm air generated by the fire below, whereupon it occurred to him that heated air, contained in some way, might be made to carry solid objects. (This has all the marks of the apocryphal stories that are common to the history of invention. An alternate version, which Gillispie carefully records, is

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that Joseph came to his epiphany while drying underwear over a brazier and noticing that the fabric billowed as it warmed.) Whatever the true case, Joseph promptly constructed a small parallelepiped frame, covered it with taffeta and hemp cord, and, using twists of paper as fuel, sent the model aloft.

The Montgolfiers were undaunted by the loss of their first balloon at Annonay. The knowledge that they had acquired from their trial—information on the cooling rate and density of enclosed gases, fuel consumption, and the like—and the fact that a pack of eager competitors (Meusnier de la Place, the brothers Robert) were close behind inspired them to forge on. Moving north to Versailles, the Montgolfiers sent up a second craft on September 19, 1783, this time with a cargo of passengers: a duck, a sheep, and a rooster. The balloon rose to a height of fifteen hundred feet, lost air accidentally, and floated gently to the ground, its riders emerging unharmed.

On October 19, 1783, before the watchful citizens of Paris, the Montgolfiers launched their first manned flight, guided by the dashing Pilâtre de Rozier (who two years later would be the first known human—after Daedelus—to die in an air crash). The flight was a success. Thirty-two days later a second manned flight went up, with Pilâtre and the Marquis d'Arlandes on board. The balloon stayed aloft for twenty-five minutes and burned only a fraction of its fuel, but the marquis lost his nerve and forced the craft to earth, landing very poorly indeed. Gillispie notes that among the observers of this mixed success was Benjamin Franklin, who returned to America full of wonder at what he had seen.

Encouraged by their test flights, the Montgolfiers went on experimenting with their balloons, and so did all Europe. Building and launching tiny hydrogen-filled globes became the middle-class craze from London to St. Petersburg, and soon America was caught up in the excitement. Only a year after their first flight, the Montgolfiers were carrying passengers aloft on pleasure spins, a recreation made doubly popular by Louis-Sebastian Le Normand's invention of the parachute. (He got the idea, it seems, from a travel book that told of Arabian slaves entertaining their masters by leaping off parapets and sailing to the ground, slowing their descent with parasols. The chronicler's honesty is doubtful, but that did not keep Le Normand from his work.)

The Montgolfiers, scions of the gentry, were forced by the Revolution to curtail their public exhibitions; but after Robespierre's fall from power, they emerged with renewed intensity. Joseph and Etienne, busy always, developed new and better craft, unveiling them before the great crowds that followed their every move. After Etienne's death, Joseph set about developing a method for dehydrating fruit, constructed a hydraulic ram and an internal-combustion engine, and contributed to the fledgling theory of the tensile strength of materials. (His work in the last area was carried on by his great-nephew Marc Seguin, who designed a prototype suspension bridge and helped invent the tubular boiler, both essential to the evolution of the railroad.)

The Montgolfier Brothers and the Invention of Aviation is a fine addition to the literature of scientific discovery, documenting with care a great forward leap in the history of the human imagination. It is graceful and well

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written throughout, for Charles Gillispie is a practiced writer with a number of good books to his credit; and it is easily apprehended by readers with only a basic understanding of the scientific principles involved in the Montgolfiers' triumph, which did nothing less than make Archytas's astonishing dream come true.

Seeing Afresh

SIGNS OF LIFE. *By Alfred Appel, Jr. Knopf. $30.*

Reviewed by JOHN P. SISK

Alfred Appel's handsomely produced and very readable book is described on the cover as a reexamination of American popular culture "through a close-up exploration of 109 photographs, movie stills, and other images of the past four decades." This is true enough, but it is also misleading since it suggests that *Signs of Life* is one more picture book for the nation's already overloaded coffee tables. What is easier than to gather four decades of photographs and to offer them as a pictorial comment on American life? Such collections give us pleasant ten-minute interludes as we prowl around in bookstores after lunch or pass the time on rainy Saturday afternoons. Like Ron Galella's popular *Offguard: A Paparazzi Look at the Beautiful People*, they are agreeably all out on the surface; you can open them anywhere without loss of continuity. You probably wouldn't buy one even if it were being drastically remaindered, but if you got one as a gift, you'd be happy to spend another ten minutes with it.

Signs of Life is not in this class. It blends "formalist analysis, cultural history, and memoir" as it commingles literature, photography, and cinema. If a bookstore snooper had to choose between it and Galella's collection, I suspect that without a moment's hesitation he would choose the latter for the same reason he would choose the *National Enquirer* over THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR (if such a choice were possible) while standing in the checkout line at the supermarket. Galella looks like fun; Appel looks like work. Who would spend time with George Tice's *Strand Theater, Front Street, Keyport, New Jersey, September, 1973* or Lee Friedlander's *Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1975* when he could have Julie Christie dodging an autograph hound or Roman Polanski chewing on a huge cigar? Galella believes that the real glamour that is natural to every celebrity can be caught by the camera when its subject is off guard. In an age when it is so discouragingly easy to believe that the glamour of celebrities is chiefly in the eyes of the beholder, this can be cheering news indeed.

Appel, a professor of English and a specialist in Nabokov and *film noir* at Northwestern University, brings bad news. His argument is that, however apparently authentic photographs like Galella's may be, the visual pollution of our culture encourages us not to look closely at them, even keeps them from deserving a close look. "An immersion in such a visual culture," he writes, "does not develop good readers of books or photographs." To make matters worse, "educated viewers need more help than ever" since even "the scholars and critics of photography are more interested in history and theory than in the basic problems of literacy and interpretation." With the right kind of help, I can imagine him adding, Galella's fans might learn to see that his book, for all its promise of a new and revealing perspective, is really the record of an imprisonment by celebrity.

Appel's most valuable service, then, is that he teaches one how to look at pictures. The service is especially useful for those lookers, such as this reviewer, who tend naively to look at pictures in the same way that so many people before romanticism tended to read poems: as mirrorlike images of reality. In this respect Appel is like Marshall McLuhan, who, some thirty years ago, was teaching us how to look at pictorial advertisements in *The Mechanical Bride*. It is significant that both teachers are literary critics equipped with the tools of irony and point of view, both are inclined to read pictures as closely as we, since the New Critics, have learned to read poems, and both are convinced of the the-

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matic continuity between high and popular culture. Appel, too, believes that the medium is the message, though less simplistically than McLuhan and with less confidence in the salvific power of the electronic media. In fact, his perceptive comments on photographs that feature the television medium itself (those of Robert Frank, Bill Owens, and Helen Levitt, for instance) make it clear that he is decidedly cool about McLuhan's "cool" medium.

In emphasizing Appel's value as a teacher of looking, I don't mean to discount his book as an original essay on popular culture. Indeed, he is a good reader of popular culture because he is a good reader of photographs. As an example of how interrelated these two kinds of reading are in *Signs of Life*, I offer his analysis of Robert Frank's *Movie Premier, Hollywood, 1956*. Here, in what is identified as a masterpiece of the anti-Hollywood genre in photography, we see a movie starlet in deadpan close-up (realizing perhaps that she is doomed to go nowhere) against a background of star-struck lesser mortals who "are looking elsewhere or through her." In locating this photograph as complementary to *The Day of the Locust*, Appel resists two related and attractive oversimplifications: he refuses to see Nathanael West's novel as the last word on Hollywood because it is "too abstract and didactically charged," and he refuses to go the easy way of the sociologizing critic who sees the starlet as simply a metaphor for vulgarity. Similarly, in his treatment of photographs of full-fledged movie stars (Ann Sheridan, Tyrone Power, Humphrey Bogart, Joan Crawford, Greta Garbo, and Buster Keaton, for instance) he shuns the easy reductive line that the whole cultural truth about the glamorous people is simply the opposite of what a Galella believes it to be. Thus he prefers Richard Avedon's austere and somewhat haggard 1953 photograph of Bogart to George Hurrell's earlier and heavily doctored glamour portrait, not because the former debunks the latter but because it shows the man rather than the actor—the man caught "in the face of the most painful truth, our common condition."

In connection with Hurrell's Bogart, Appel writes of "the extent to which our culture is unwilling to 'entertain' the idea or ideas of death." This observation—commonplace enough in most contexts—is unobtrusively central to his book. On the Fourth of July at age 42, Appel suffered "a massive and quite unexpected heart attack." Unable to concentrate on the written language during the long and stressful period of recovery, he was confined to the visual world of picture books and magazines, television, and reruns of old movies on television. During this time a "helpful memory performed all sorts of miracles . . . by restoring lost interiors and facades." No doubt this experience helps to explain why movies and movie stars (especially those recollected from childhood), old movie theaters, and posters for movies are so often the subjects of the photographs he has chosen to write about—and the occasion, incidentally, of some first-rate movie criticism. Thus, the forced retirement from the world with its threat of an impoverishment of vision has paradoxically resulted in a sharpening of perception, not only for photographs but for the sensible world. *Signs of Life* is proof that the uses of adversity are sometimes sweet.

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The Reader Replies

The Gospel According to Ludwig

In my review of Professor Saul Kripke's book (*Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, in the Spring 1984 issue), I stated that Professor Kripke had failed to reply to a letter offering him a Chair at the University of Cambridge. I made this statement in all good faith, on the basis of being told this was so by someone connected with that University, whose own good faith also is not open to doubt. Quite independently of my review article, I find this statement has had fairly wide currency amongst people connected with the subject.

I have now received a letter from Professor Kripke assuring me that the statement is untrue, and that he *did* reply to the letter offering him the Chair at that University. I do of course unreservedly accept Professor Kripke's affirmation, and wish hereby to express my sincere and deep regret at any inconvenience or annoyance the untrue statement may have caused him or members of his family.

In the past, I have myself been the object of statements in an article which first appeared in an American periodical with wide circulation, and thereafter reappeared as part of a book, and which were totally untrue (and in that case, not made in good faith). In such a situation in practice one finds oneself without redress, unless the author of the published statements is willing to retract. The fact that I have had this experience leads me to regret all the more strongly that I should have done anything similar to Professor Kripke, even if it was done in good faith, and on a much smaller scale.

Ernest Gellner
The London School of Economics
London, England

Moral Education in America

It is sad that admittedly flawed efforts to solve problems of moral education were treated so shabbily by Professor Sommers in "Ethics Without Virtue" (AS: Summer 1984). That students—and, perhaps, even a few philosophers—are morally confused is not surprising. That such confusion has been caused by the spread of moral education in the classroom is simply unsupported by the evidence. Much more likely as a source of moral malaise is the elevation of opportunism to cultural and political principle. When we add the complexity of today's experience, we should not be surprised at finding a troubled moral situation.

Of the many errors of fact and interpretation in the article, let me comment on only three. Professor Sommers refers over and over again to a "bag of virtues." The phrase was used by Kohlberg to criticize any moral education which simply accrues and preaches a disparate list of moral values. We used to call it "bead stringing." Like theorists since Plato, Kohlberg searches for organizing moral principles. For example, Aristotle found them in the "mean," Kant in the "reasonable being," and Dewey in "experience." In other words, Kohlberg is very much within the tradition of western ethical inquiry. In fact, he finds his philosophic principle in Rawls's "justice as fairness," and his psychological principle in Piaget's notion of cognitive development. Despite the article's claims, moral development theorists of whom Kohlberg is a pioneer are concerned for moral substance and not just moral procedures.

A second instance of misinterpretation is found in the article's near paranoid reading of the phrase, "hidden curriculum." In fact, the term describes a salient feature of all moral education, i.e., actual relationships convey moral values in a strong way. Therefore, the "explicit curriculum" must take account of such relationships. The old saw, "do as I say, not as I do," is the impetus for this description. If, for example, a part of the "hidden curriculum" like the school environment demeans students, teachers, or parents, then moral values like self-respect cannot effectively be taught. Strangely, the traditional philosophic roots of the discussion of the "hidden curriculum" were utterly ignored by Professor Sommers, i.e., Socrates' puzzled question, "can virtue be taught?" It is in the attempt to work with that question that experiments like the "just

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community" are developed. As with all experiments, we learn more from failure than success . . . and we are learning.

The agenda of the article is revealed in its references to "liberals" and its implicit defense of those "bourgeois virtues" that we moral educators allegedly defame. Professor Sommers is, in other words, one of a growing number of philosophic neo-conservatives. Ironically, "values clarification" unlike cognitive theory is a response to conservative assumptions. It relies on the notion that home and church are properly the source of values and so limits the common school to their identification and explication. Toleration, while insufficient, is surely a necessary public virtue in a pluralist society. Unlike cognitive development theory, values clarification sees the public classroom as morally neutral *just because of its conservative reading of the* sources and sanctions of moral values.

I will resist comment on Professor Sommers's collection of linguistic horrors at the beginning of her article. Suffice to say that we philosophers are not exactly immune to semantic sins either. Obviously, no one has been a truly successful moral educator—not today, not yesterday. That, it seems to me, would suggest that efforts to find out how to do it better, how to make it consistent with what we are learning about human development, and how to make it an effective center of pedagogy warrant both support and criticism. Unfortunately, the article provides neither. Instead, it will only mislead readers unfamiliar with the situation in the classroom and in research.

HOWARD B. RADEST
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New York, New York

CHRISTINA HOFF SOMMERS replies: Dr. Radest is not one for giving specifics. He states that my article contains errors of fact but has no time to point one out. He alludes to experimental successes but cites no examples. (It may be that there are none to report. This would not necessarily trouble Dr. Radest since he holds the convenient view that failure is scientifically more edifying than success.) He gives assurance that from the failures much is being learned, but he does not say what.

As to "errors of interpretation," they come down to fundamental disagreements. Dr. Radest believes that I am unfair to the theorist-reformers of moral education that I criticize in my article. And he charges me with misrepresenting "the situation in the classroom and research." But he assumes, as I do not, that the classroom is properly available to the reformers for testing out their theories. As an educator Dr. Radest must believe that what Simon and Kohlberg and their respective followers are doing in the classroom has significant long-term effects on the student-subjects. I have found these effects harmful. Perhaps this is not Dr. Radest's experience. But while he is vocal about the successes and failures of the reformers, he plays down the effects on students. Having undertaken an apologist's role he prefers to make noises about opportunism and the complexities of modern life to discussing the serious situation described in my article. (The suggestion that opportunism causes moral malaise is about as illuminating as the suggestion that moral malaise causes opportunism.)

Dr. Radest again directs attention away from the topic at hand when he unmasks me as an anti-liberal "neo-conservative" whose objective is the preservation of the "bourgeois virtues." (I did not in fact refer to liberals, and the phrase "bourgeois virtues" occurs in a quotation from Trotsky.) My article makes the point that current discussion in moral education is dominated by the rhetoric of the Moral Majority on the one side and the New England theorist-reformers on the other. It suggests that there is a large moderate constituency that needs to have its voice heard above the din coming from trendy faddists on the right and left. Dr. Radest does not confront this central issue, finding it more comfortable to move over to speculation about my motives and political coloration.

Dr. Radest professes himself saddened by my article. For my part I am disturbed by his curriculum for moral education which has nothing hidden about it: he openly supports the use of student-subjects by educational "researchers" whose scientific standing is dubious and who come into the classroom with a confident contempt for the traditional and historical approach to moral education. Dr. Radest would do well to reflect on why he himself would strongly oppose a similar latitude for experimentation by specialists in other areas of research.

I confess that I am somewhat surprised by the heat of Dr. Radest's advocacy. I have elsewhere seen him expressing views on moral education that are more sensible than those he is moved to defend today.

Yaz

As a Red Sox fan who has admired Carl Yastrzemski ever since he began his career, I was delighted by David Wetmore's lyrical tribute. But I must take issue with his diplomatic comparison between his hero Yaz and my hero Ted Williams. Wetmore writes, "Each was of his time, and both were extraordinary. Yaz made no one forget Williams, but neither is his own record diminished by the Williams legend."

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Yaz was a far superior fielder, but there is simply no comparison between the two as batters. Ted Williams remains one of the two or three most productive hitters of all time. One of the joys of baseball is that we need not rely on anything as misty as "legend"; we have the stats.

The statistics show that Yaz had only two or three seasons that were close to Ted's standard. Had Williams not lost three full seasons in his prime to World War II, and another two to the Korean War, he would have amassed lifetime records in numerous categories. Yaz was a first-rate ball player who is in the record books because of consistency, durability, tenacity, and the good fortune to have avoided war and serious injury. Just as Henry Aaron doesn't seriously threaten Babe Ruth's legend, neither does Yaz threaten Ted's.

Because of his volatile and single-minded temperament, and because he didn't play in New York City, Ted never received his due even during his career. He was deprived of MVP awards by writers whom he had offended.

His goal, he said as a young man, was to become the greatest hitter of all time. Babe Ruth, and perhaps Ty Cobb, are his only rivals for that crown.

ROBERT H. BELL
Williams College
Williamstown, Massachusetts

Your Basic Language Snob

Aristides' language snob column in the Summer 1984 AMERICAN SCHOLAR was witty and to the point. I share all his prejudices and dislikes, including those to do with the bottom line. Nevertheless, here's Horace, not your basic modern language defiler:

Mors ultima linea rerum est.

Death is indeed the bottom line.

EUGENE G. LAFORET, M.D.
Newton Lower Falls, Massachusetts

I am compelled to comment, although I enjoyed immensely Aristides' recent essay on language snobbery, that I was disappointed at his omission of "net net," an odious form that has long since supplanted "bottom line" among economists and their ilk. I take it the term refers to the residue that remains after one has removed the superfluous following eradication of the excess.

HELEN LOUKAS
Washington, D.C.

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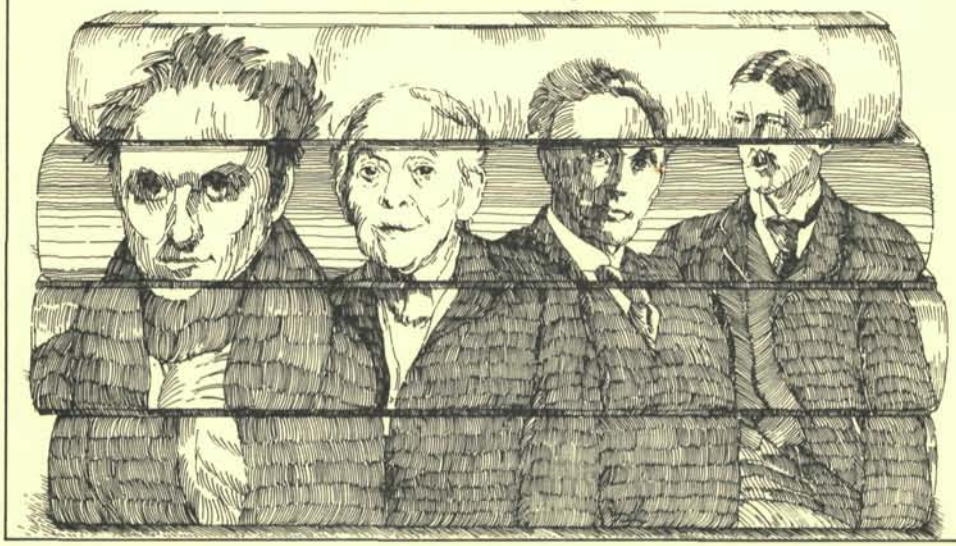

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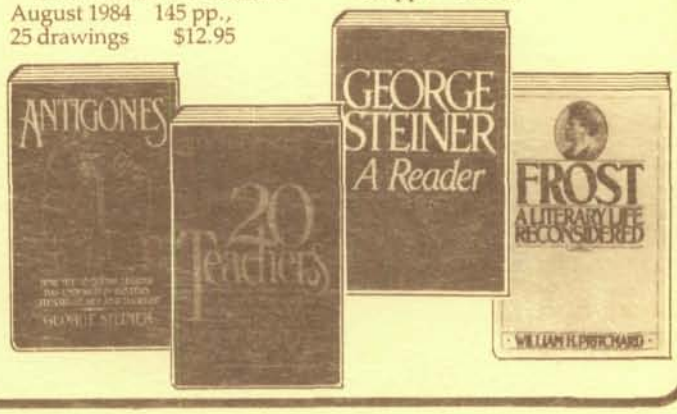

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